Bel canto and the Italian stage

Lecture 9 | Music in the Classical and Romantic Eras MCGY2612

2 May 2010

Dr David Larkin | Lecturer in Music

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Gustav Doré, 'Opéra: La fosse aux lions'
Found at http://www.davidbrassrarebooks.com

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(MIS)BEHAVIOUR AT THE OPERA

Monsieur Colimard, if you continue to leer at the dancers in such an indecent manner, I will take you home before the end of the show

Cartoon by Honore Daumier

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(MIS)BEHAVIOUR AT THE OPERA

A SHORT ITALIAN OPERA GLOSSARY

- Double aria: bipartite form typical of the period, consisting of distinct slow and fast movements
- Scena ed aria: double aria with preceding introduction (often recitative or arioso), and interlude between the two parts
- Cantabile: the, first, slower part of a double aria (also known as the ‘cavatina’, ‘andante’, ‘larghetto’)
- Tempo di mezzo: free, fast transitional passage between cantabile and cabaletta
- Cabaletta: the second, faster part of a double aria (where it involves a melodic period of two stanzas, repeated in varied form) or duet (each singer sings the melody in turn, then join together for a third iteration)
- Solita forma: lit. ‘usual form’; the standard quadripartite schema of the ‘grand duet’, consisting of a *tempo d’attacco*, adagio, *tempo di mezzo* and cabaletta
- Pertichini: short interjections by other singers/choir into an aria
- Romanza: single-movement aria

BELLINI, *NORMA*, 'CASTA DIVA'

NORMA
Are there those who dare
To raise seditious voices,
Warlike voices, before the altar of God?
Who dares to question my inspired words,
Seeking to hasten the ordained fate of Rome?
That will not come through human efforts.
OROVESO
How long, then, must we remain oppressed
By Rome? Have not the Roman eagles
Sullied enough our native shores,
Our ancestral temples? Brenno's sword
Can remain no longer idle.
ALL
Let that sword, for once, be brandished!
NORMA
And broken, if one of you should draw it
Before the destined time. Not yet
Is the moment of our vengeance.
The Roman spears are still
Stronger than the Druids axes.
ALL
What command has God given you? What prophecy?

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)

NORMA
In the secret books of Heaven,
On a mortal page, I read
The name of proud Rome.
One day she shall die; but not at your hands.
She will die, consumed
By her own vices, Await that hour,
That fatal hour decreed by God.
And meanwhile, peace! I cut the sacred
mistletoe.

BELLINI, *NORMA*, 'CASTA DIVA'

NORMA and **PRIESTESSES**

Cantabile

Chaste goddess, who dost bathe in silver light
These ancient, hallowed trees,
Turn thy fair face upon us,
Unveiled and unclouded...
Temper thou the burning hearts,
The excessive zeal of thy people.
Enfold the earth in that sweet peace
Which, through Thee, reigns in heaven.

NORMA

The holy rites are ended.
From the sacred wood
Let every unbeliever go.
When God, in his dark anger,
Shall demand the Romans' blood,
Then from the Druid temple
My voice will thunder forth.

ALL

Let it thunder, and not one of the cursed race
Shall escape the holy slaughter.
And first to fall before our wrath
Shall be the Proconsul of Rome.

NORMA

Yes, he shall fall. I can punish him –
(But my heart can never do it.

Cabaletta

Ah! bring back to me
The beauty of our first love.
Then, against the world itself
I shall be your defence.
Ah! Bring back to me
The peace and warmth of love,
And in that love I shall find again
Life, fatherland and heaven itself!)

CHORUS

But a wrathful god is hastening
To condemn the power of Rome.

NORMA

(Ah, be once more as you were
When first I gave my heart to you!)

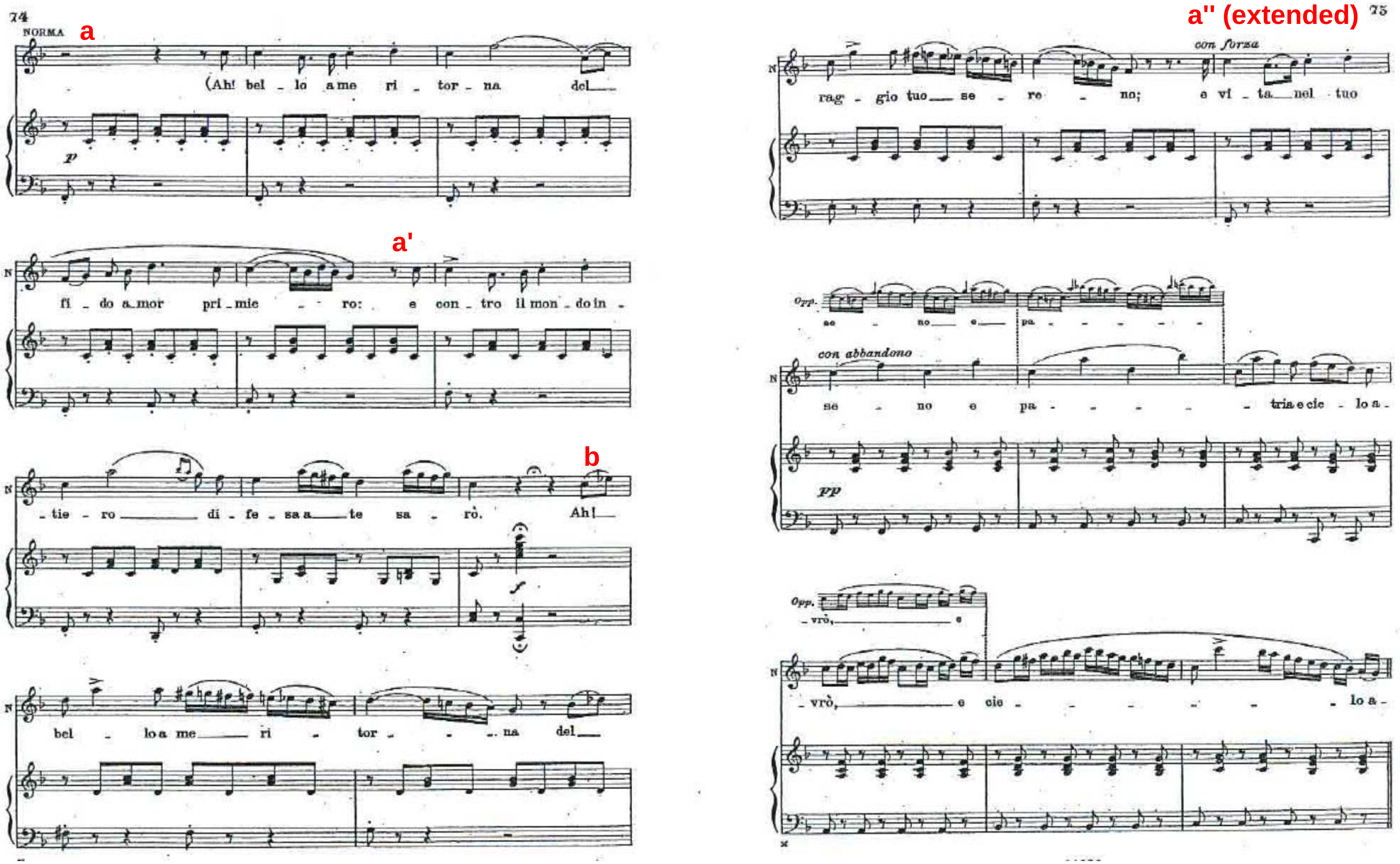
CHORUS

But the wrathful day is near,
Which will condemn the power of Rome.

Translation: http://www.opera-guide.ch

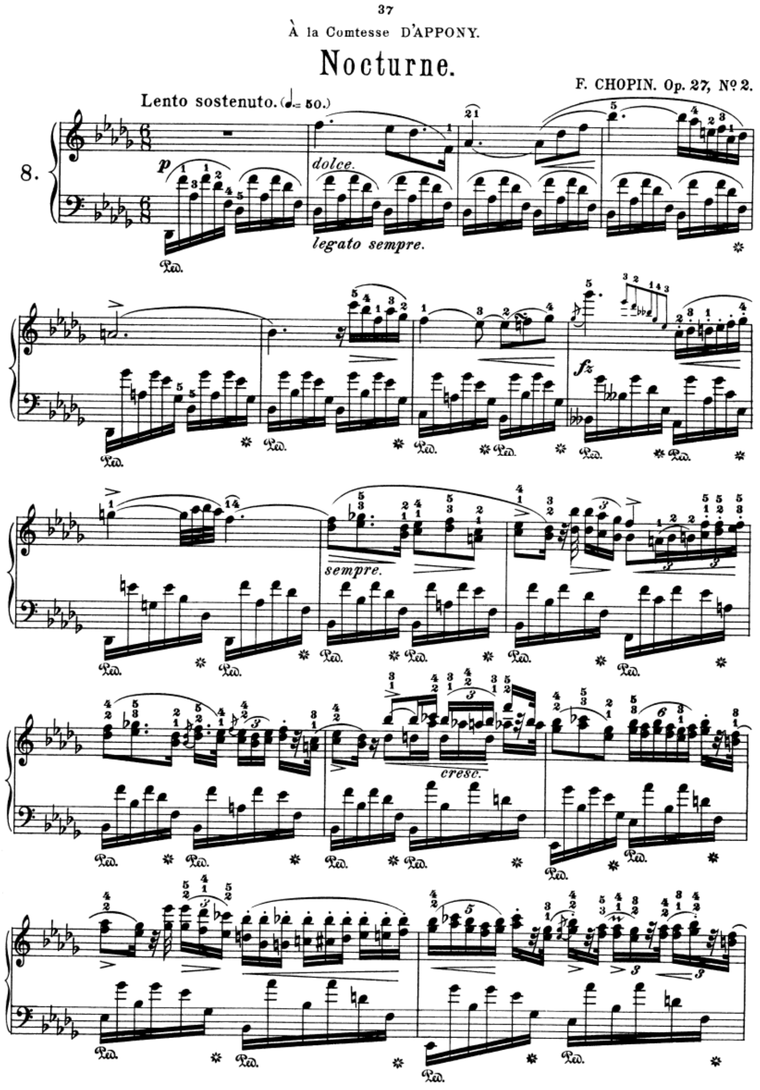
LYRIC PROTOTYPE

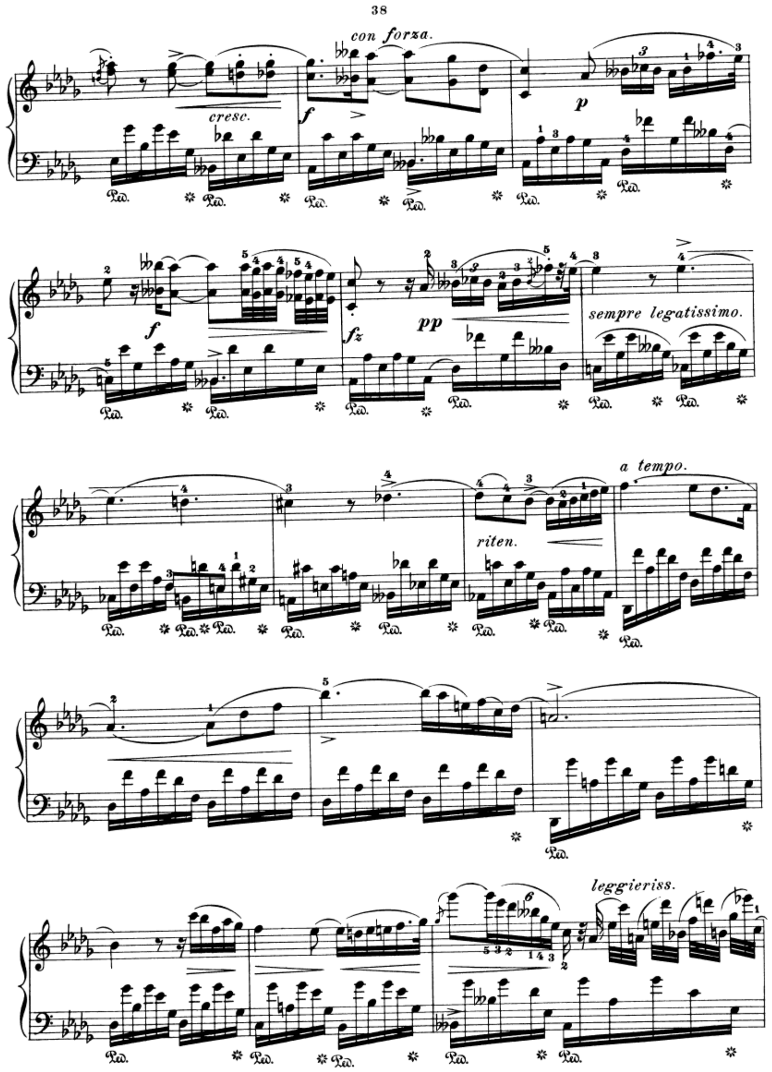
Phrase structure: a a' b a''



Cabaletta: ‘Ah! Bello a me ritorna’ (Bellini, *Norma*)

CHOPIN, NOCTURE IN Db, OP. 27/2





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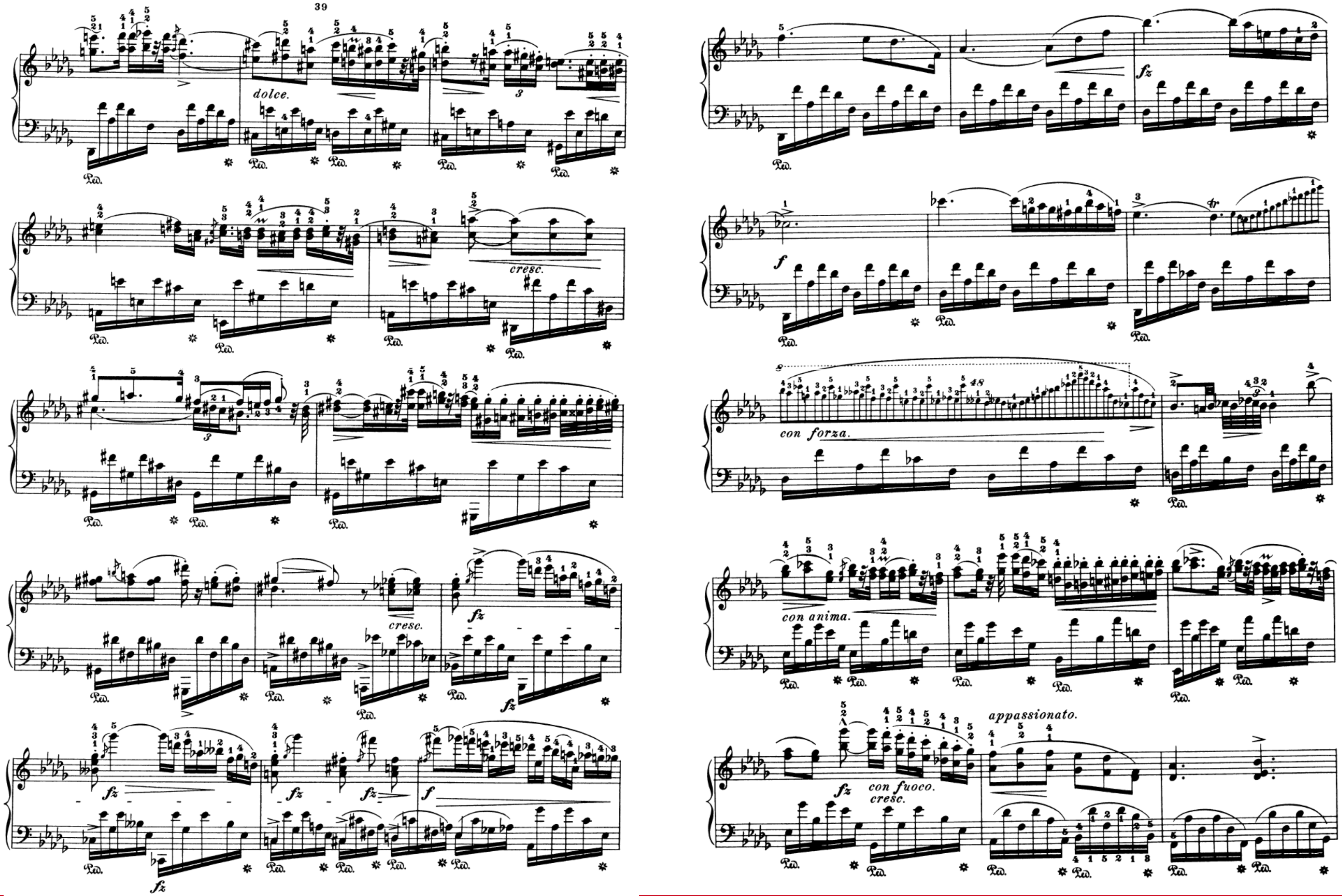

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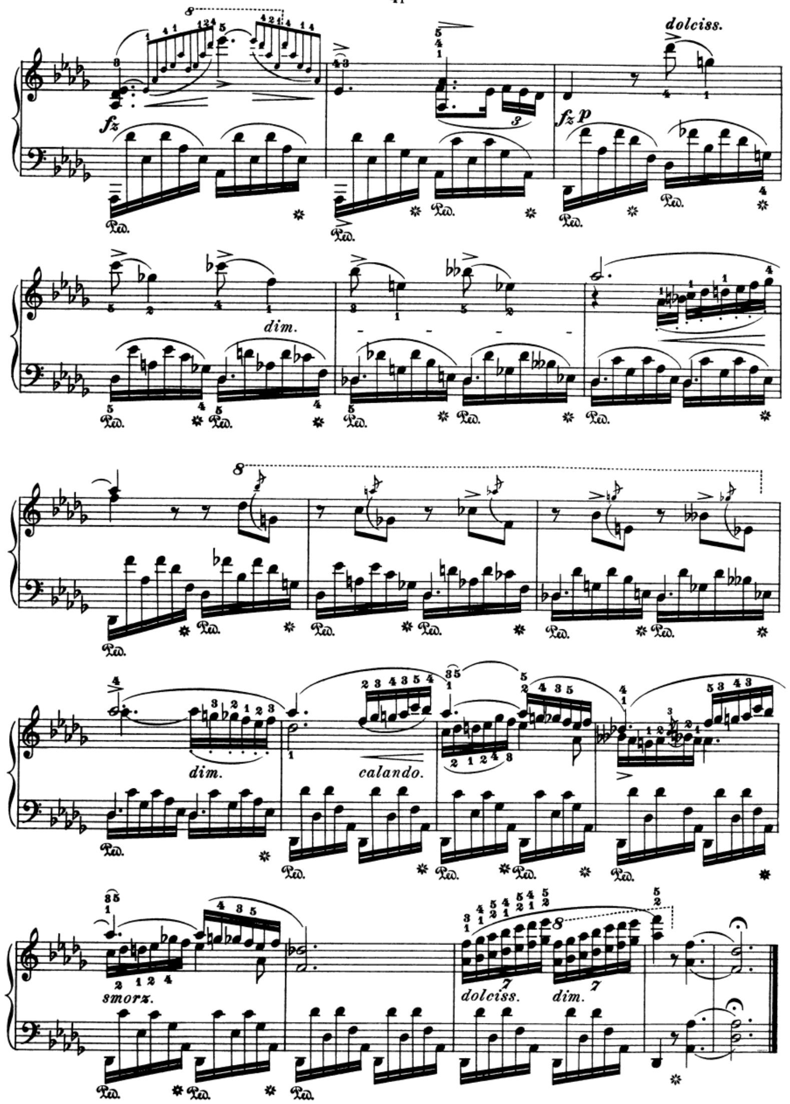
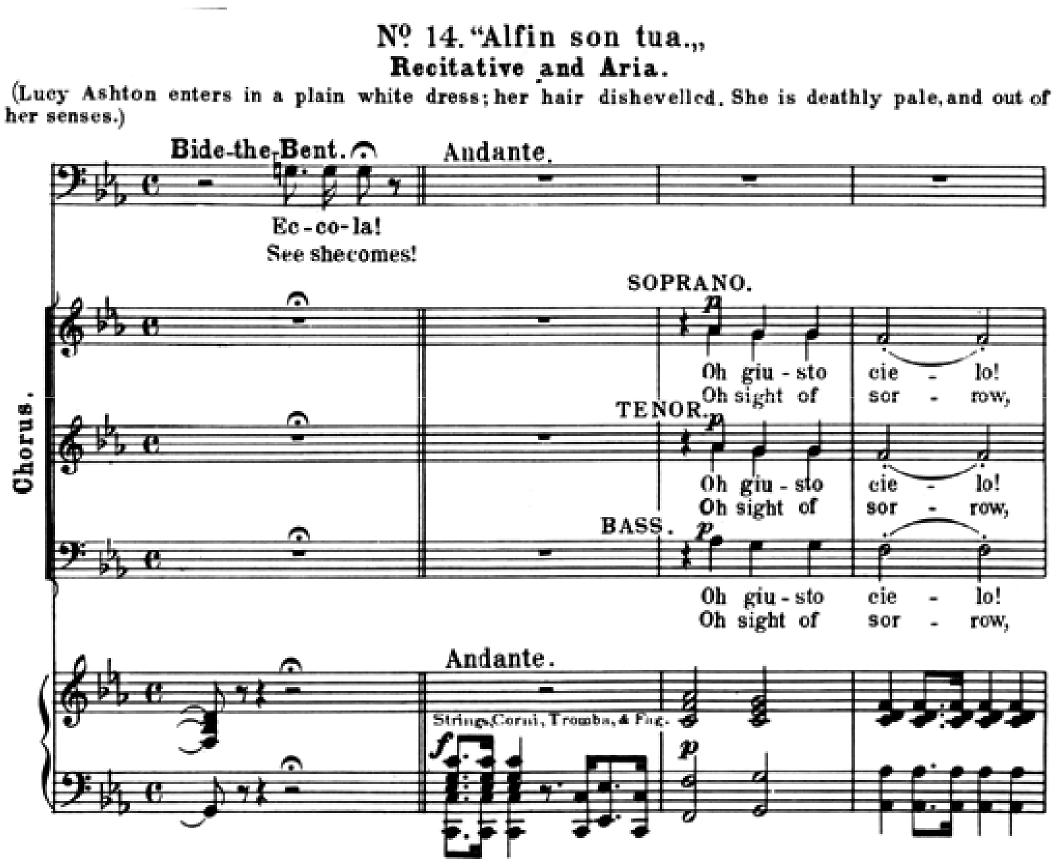
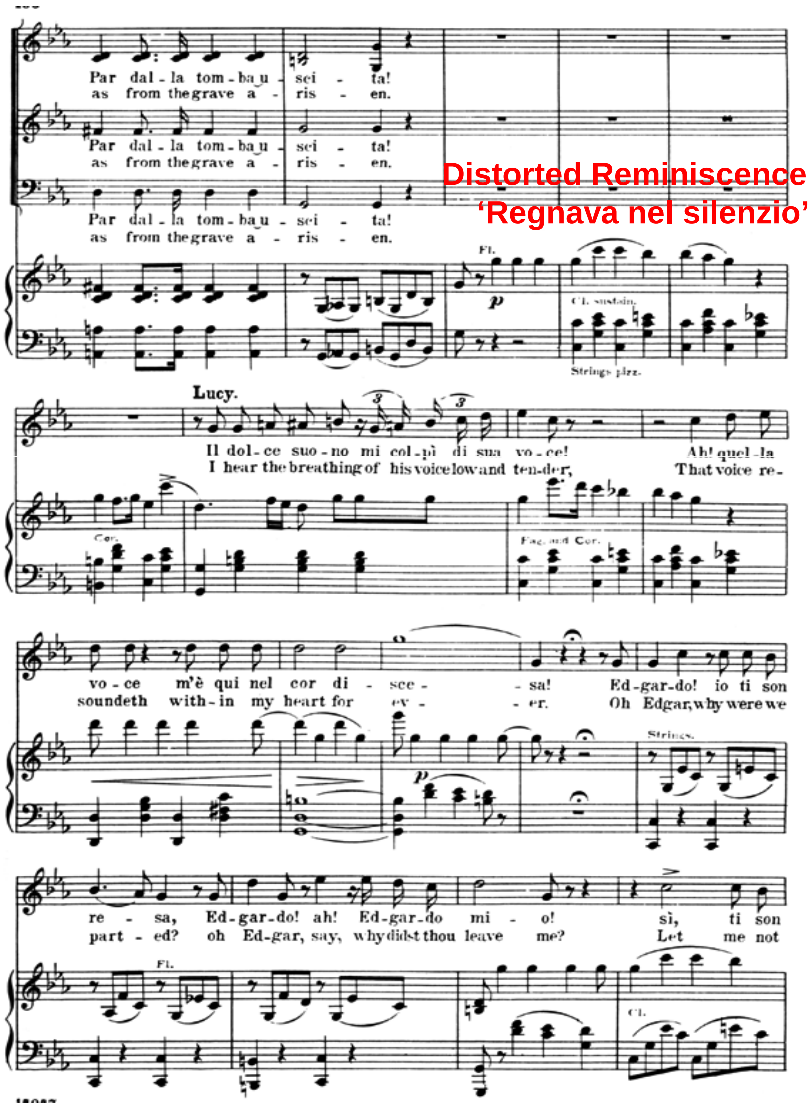


LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, ACT III: MAD SCENE

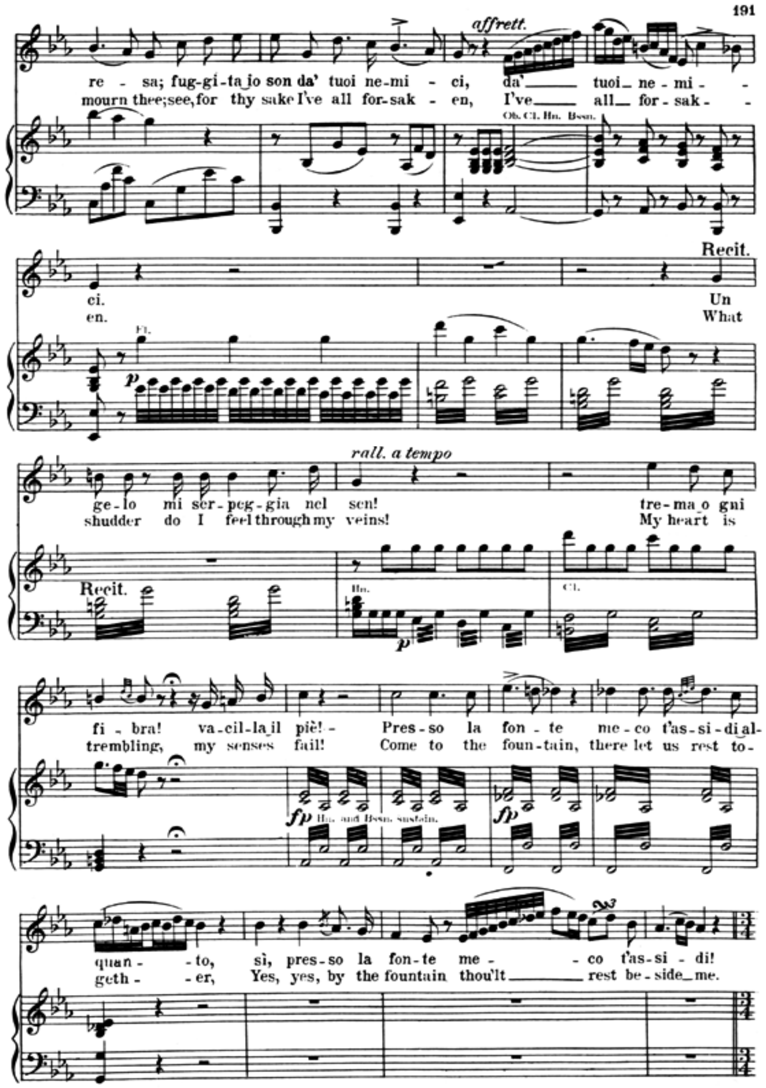


Gaetano Donizetti
(1797-1848) c.1830

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, ACT III: MAD SCENE

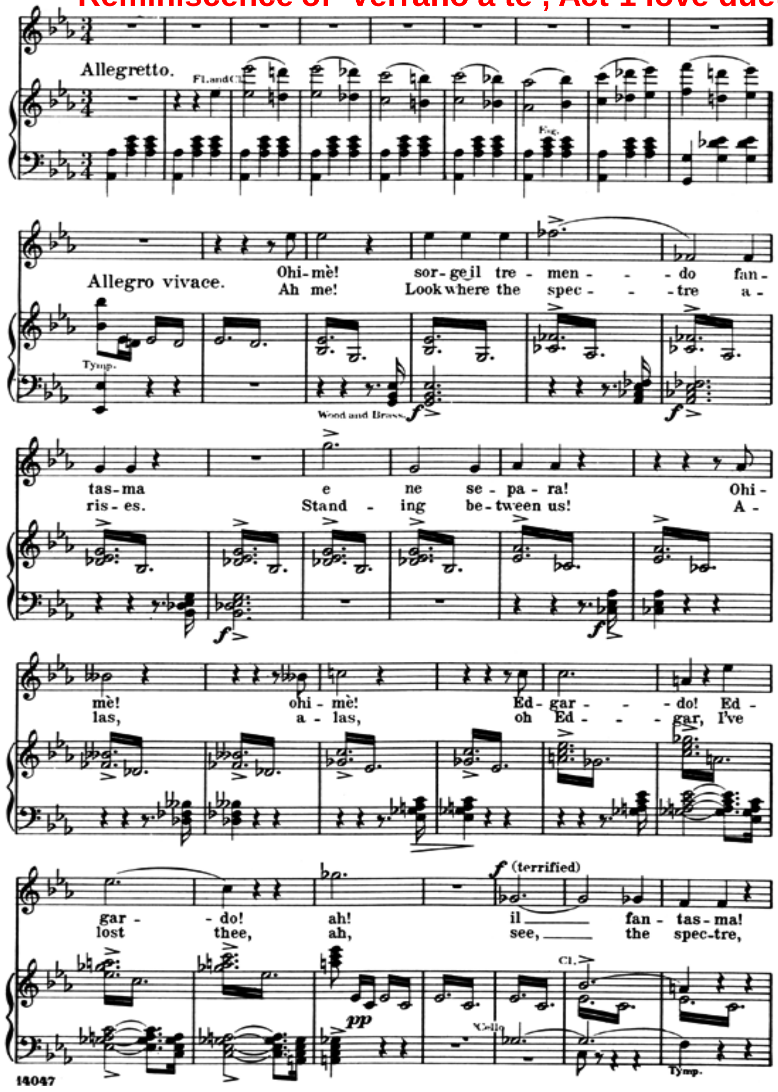


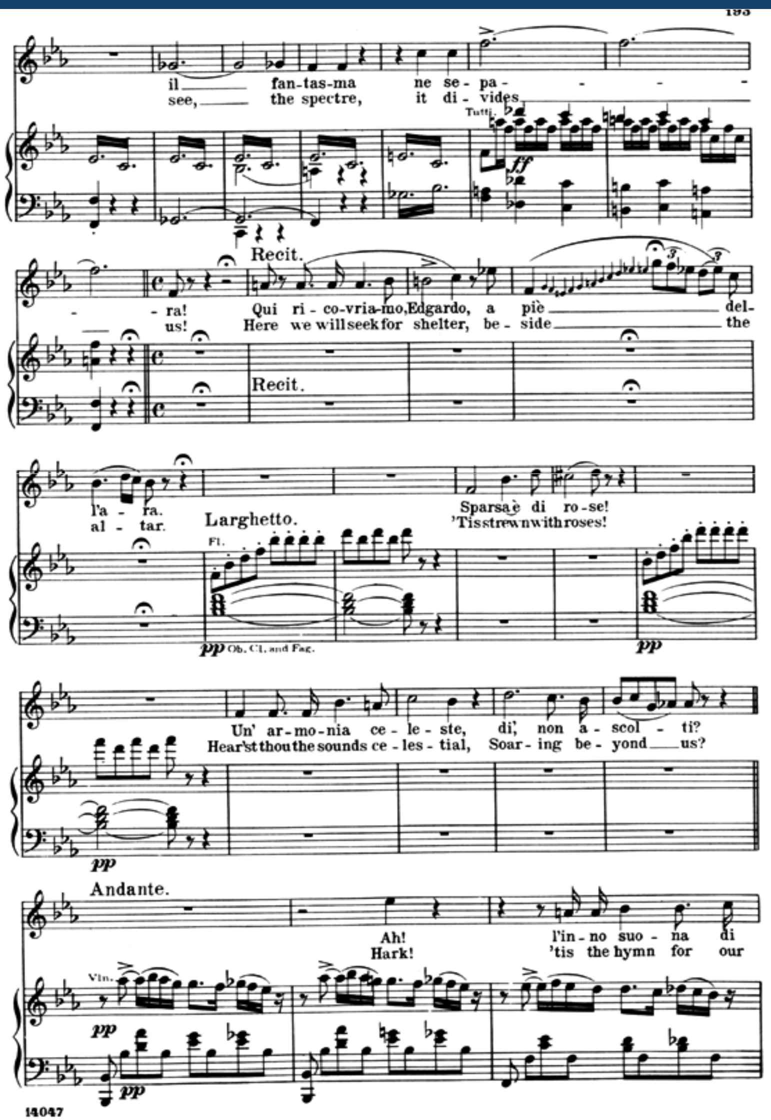
Distorted Reminiscence of
'Regnava nel silenzio'



LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, ACT III: MAD SCENE

Reminiscence of ‘Verrano a te’, Act 1 love duet





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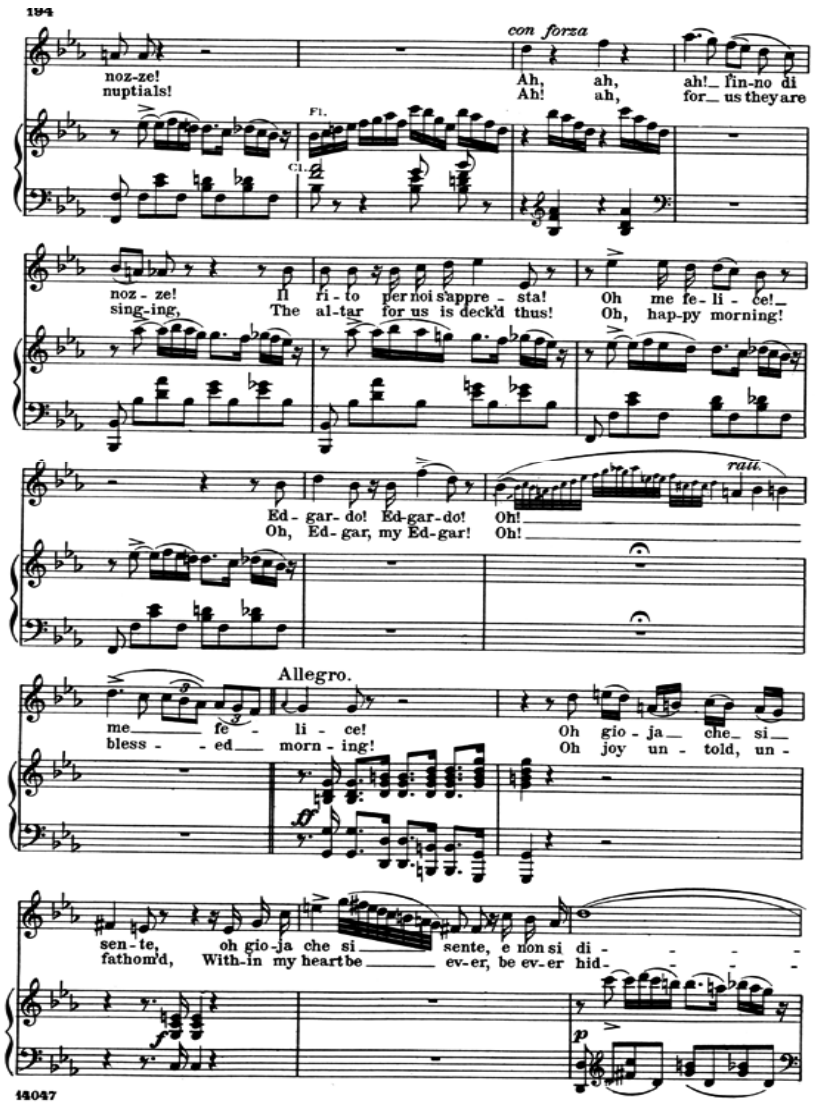
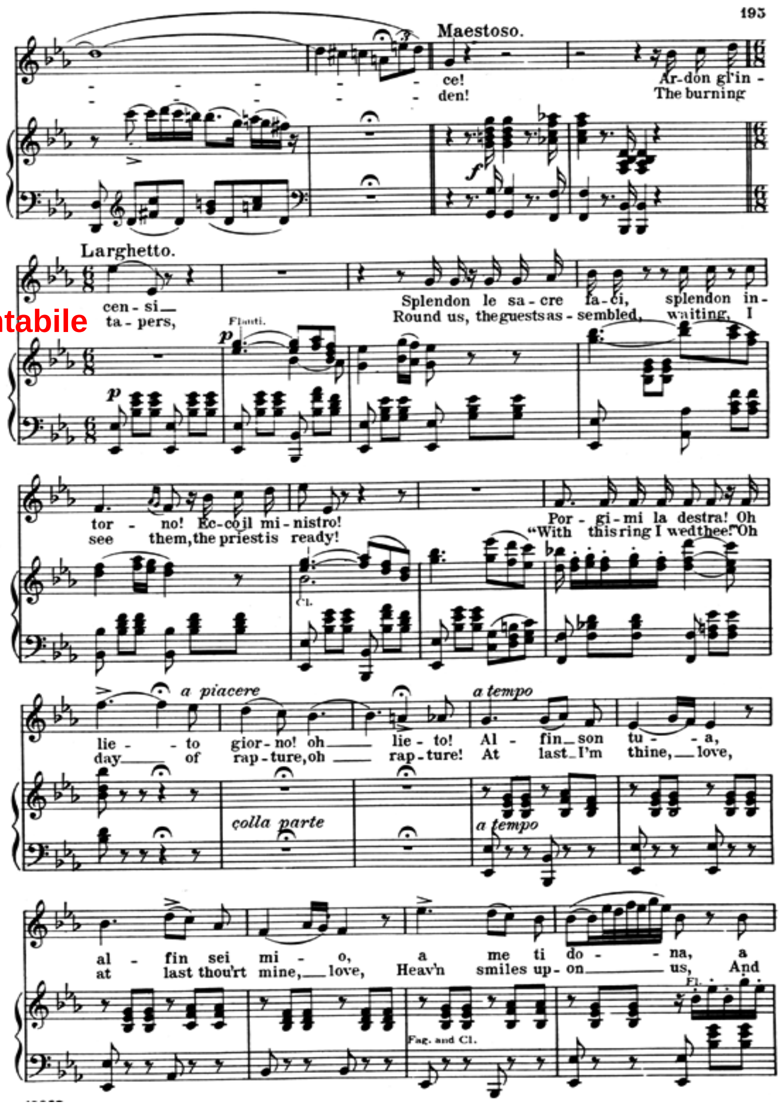


Cantabile



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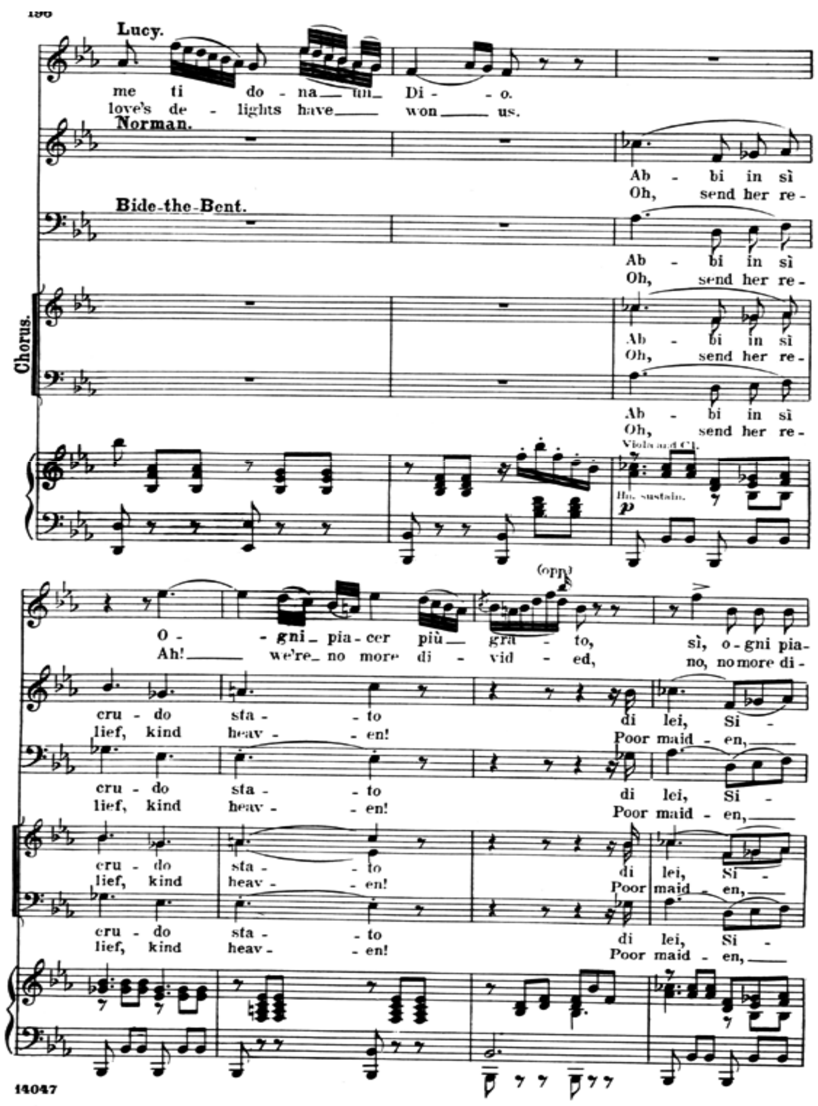

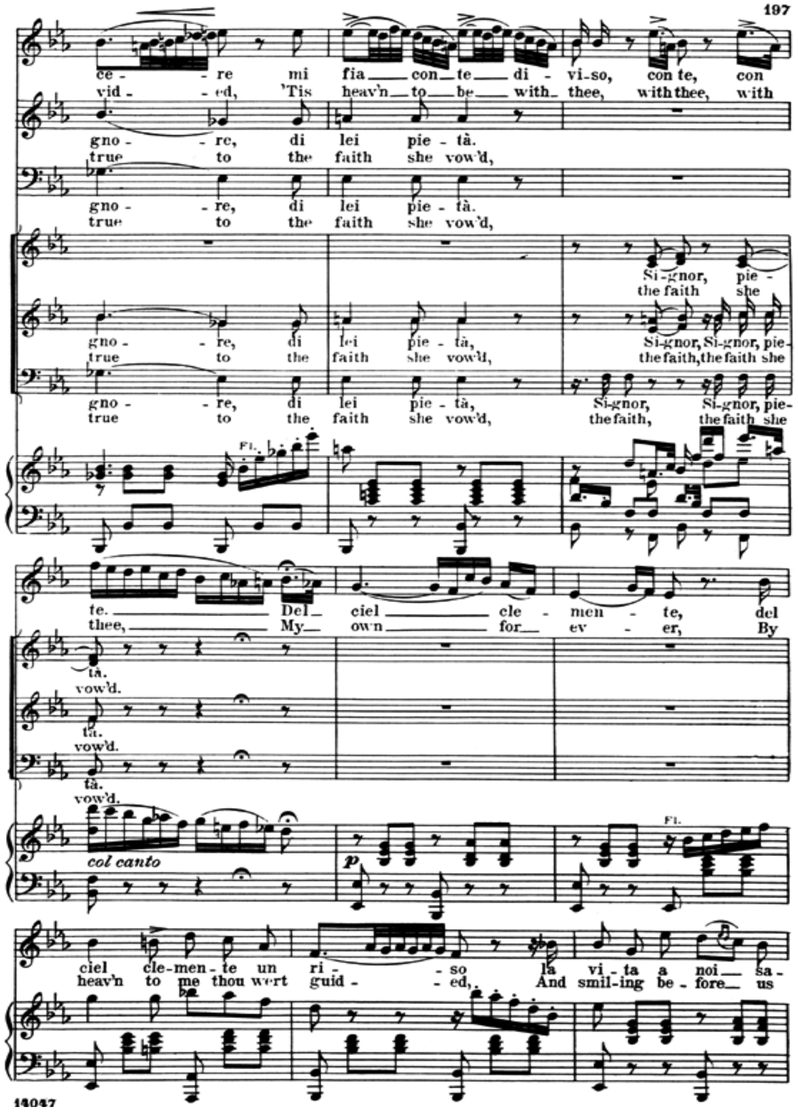

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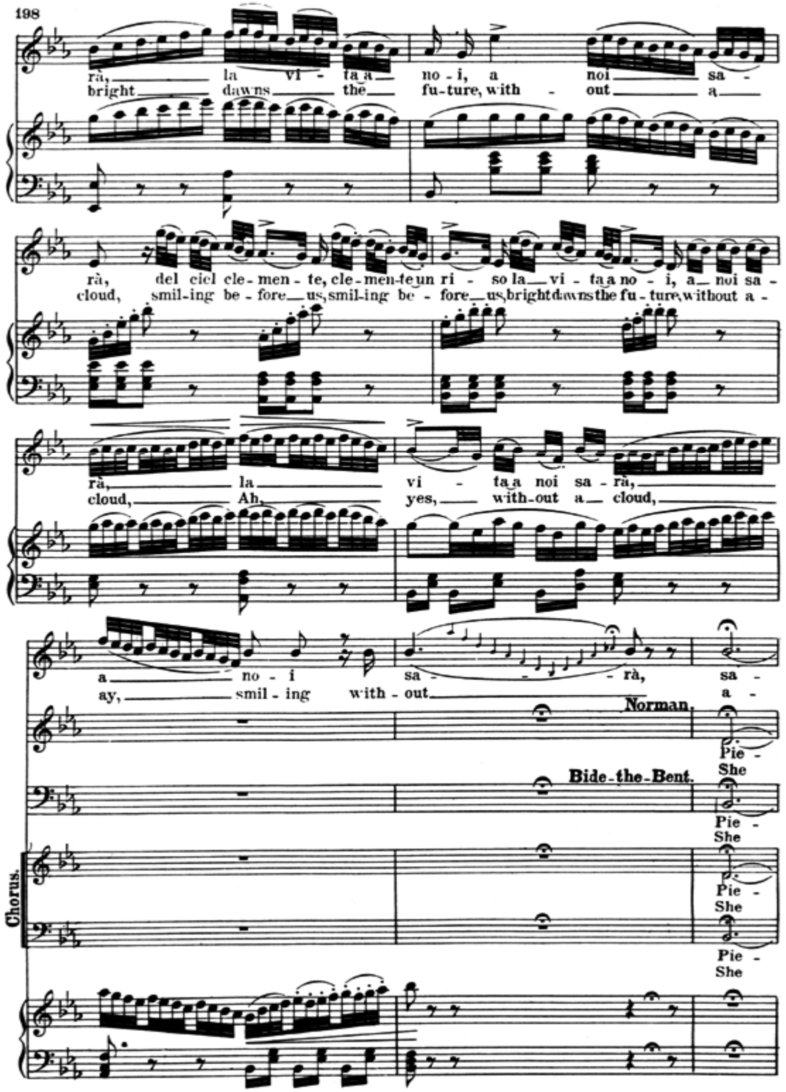
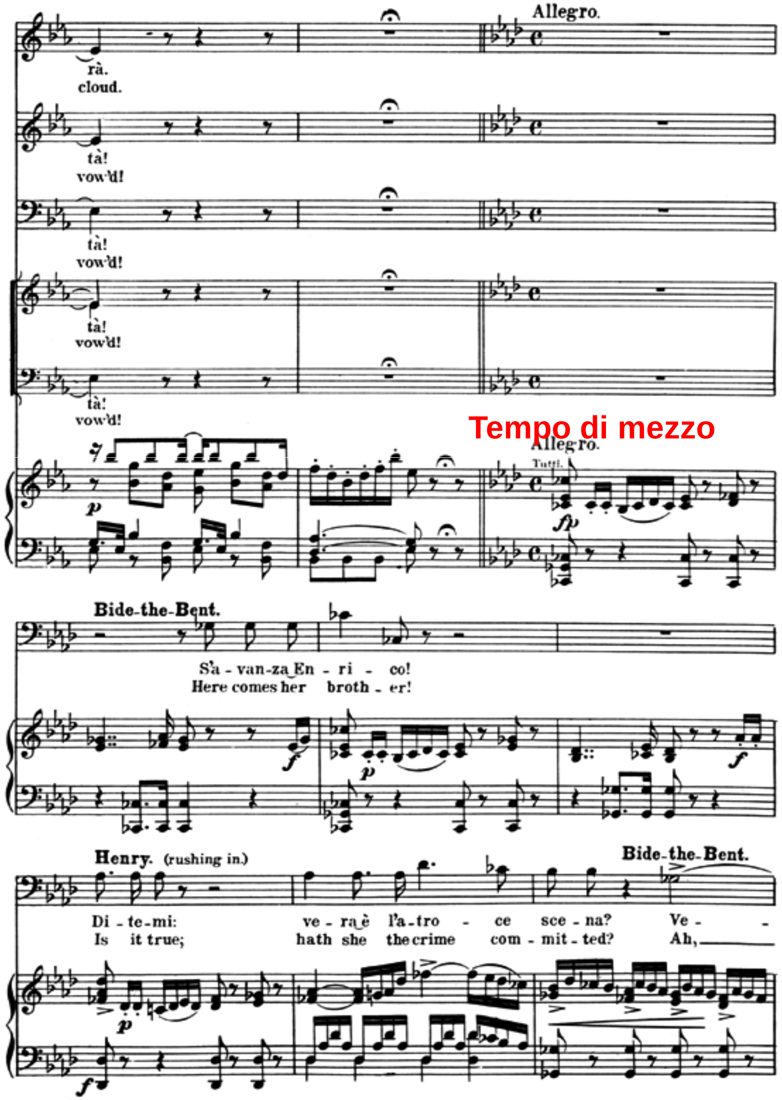




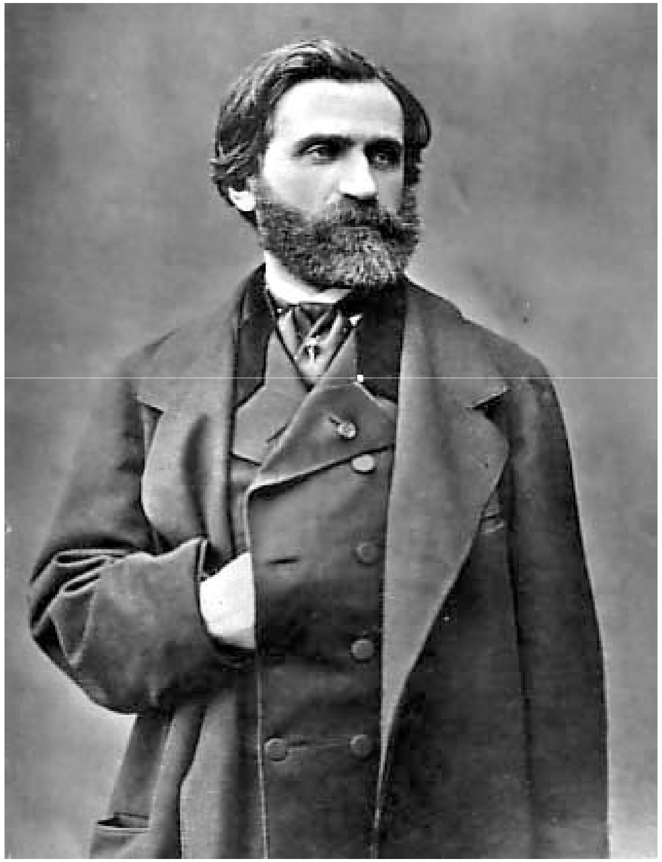
VERDI, 'VA PENSIERO', *NABUCCO* (1842)

Fly, thought, on wings of gold;
go settle upon the slopes and the hills,
where, soft and mild, the sweet airs
of our native land smell fragrant!

Greet the banks of the Jordan
and Zion's toppled towers...
Oh, my country so lovely and lost!
Oh, remembrance so dear and so fraught with despair!

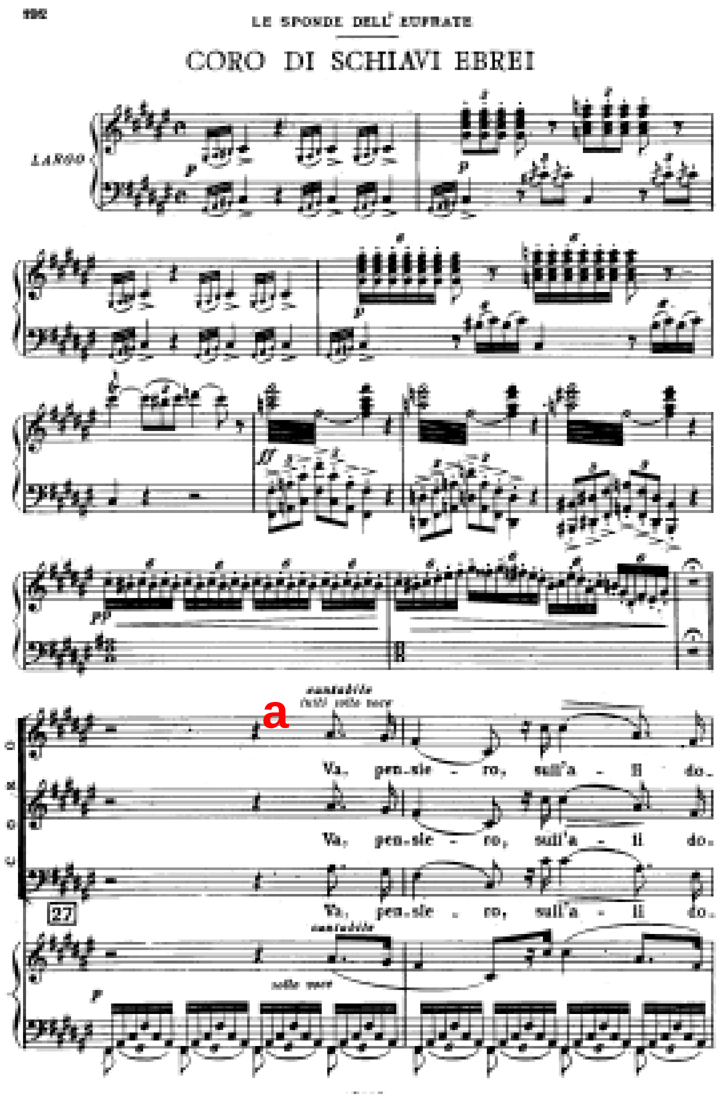
Golden harp of the prophetic seers,
why dost thou hang mute upon the willow?
Rekindle our bosom's memories,
and speak of times gone by!

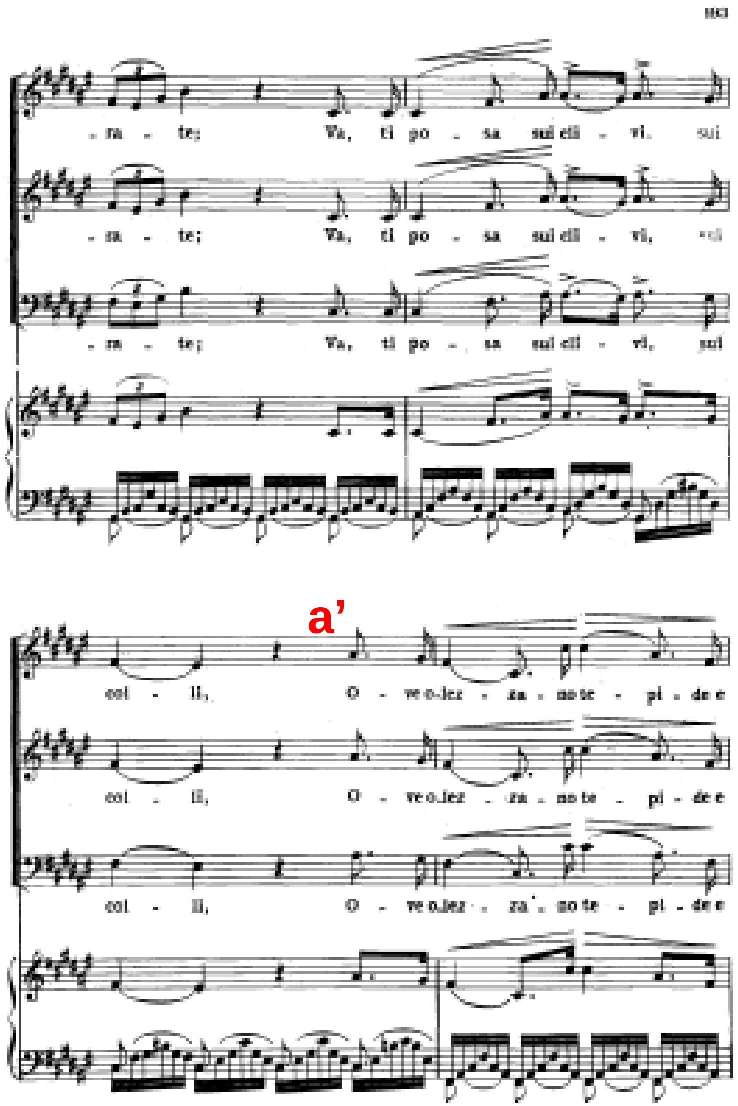
Mindful of the fate of Jerusalem,
either give forth an air of sad lamentation,
or else let the Lord imbue us
with fortitude to bear our sufferings!



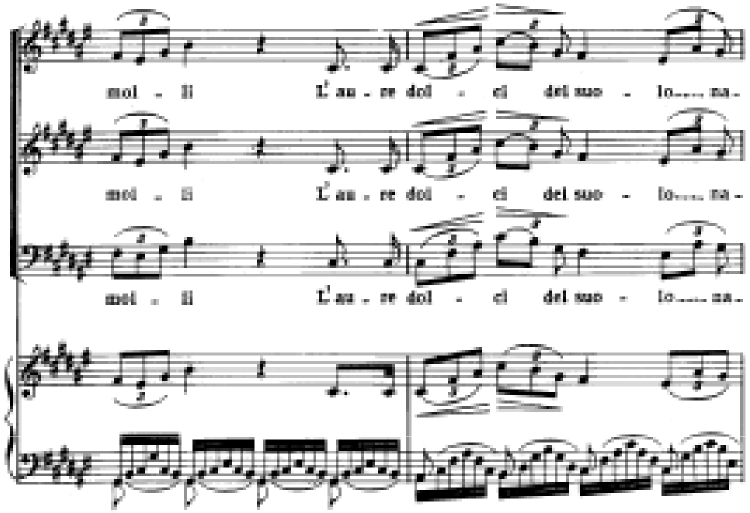
Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

VERDI, ‘VA PENSIERO’, *NABUCCO* (1842)





VERDI, ‘VA PENSIERO’, I*NABUCCO* (1842)



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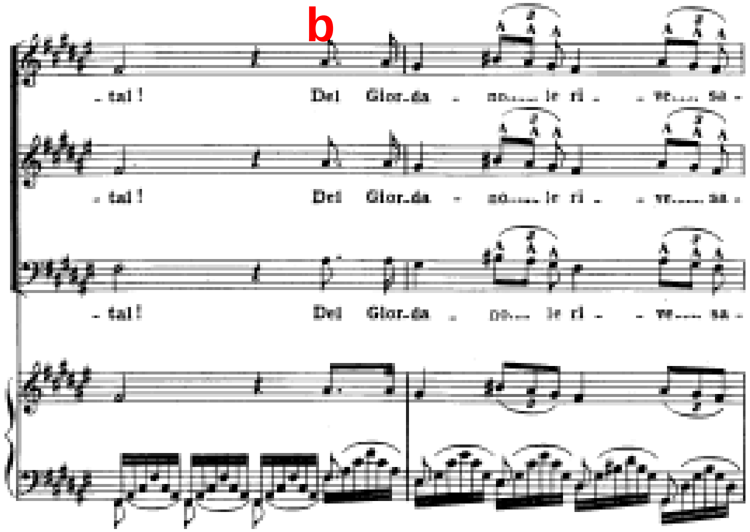

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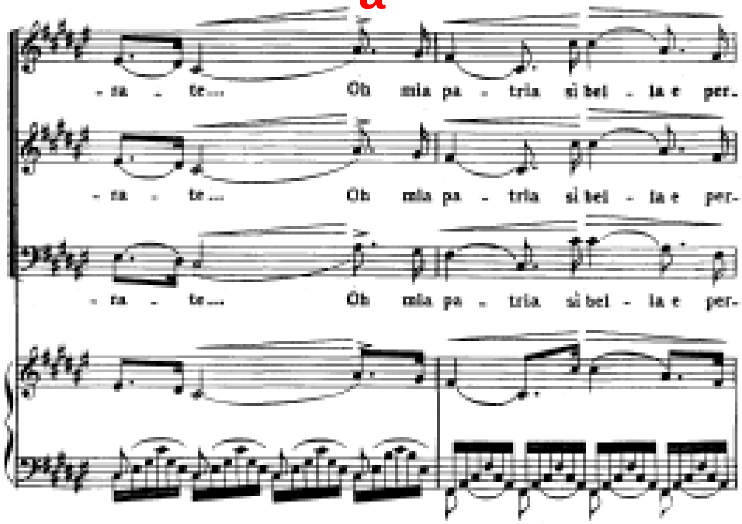

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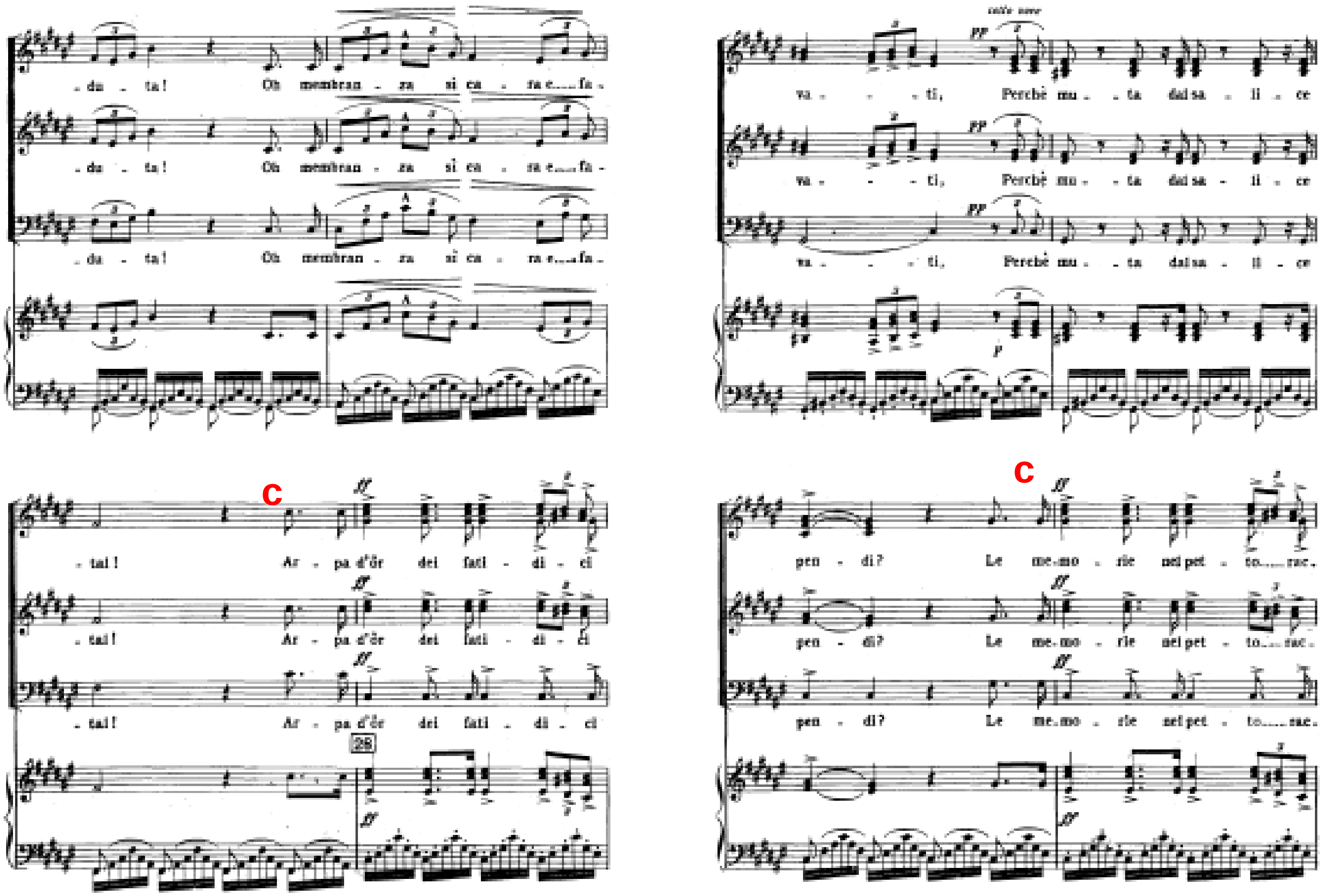

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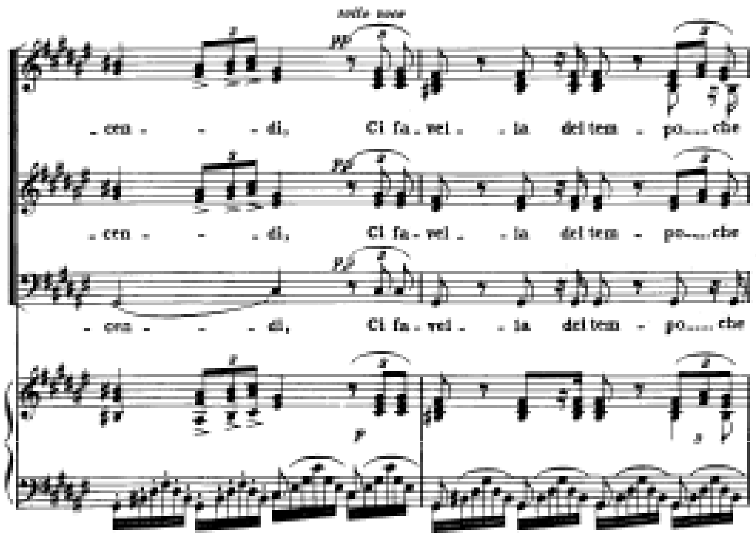

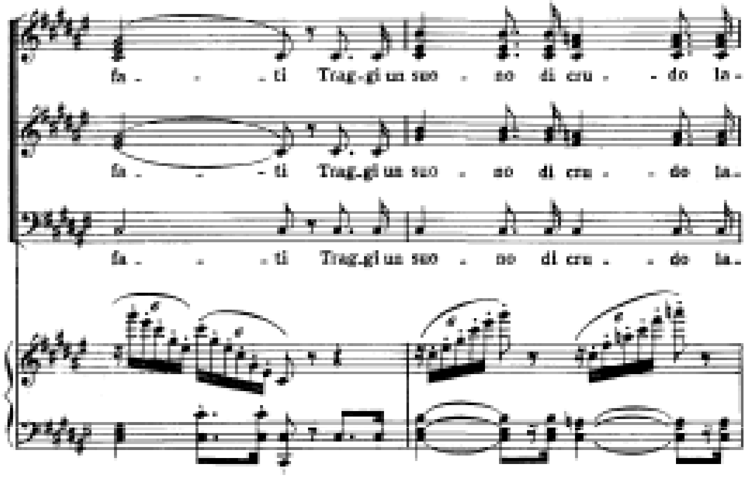

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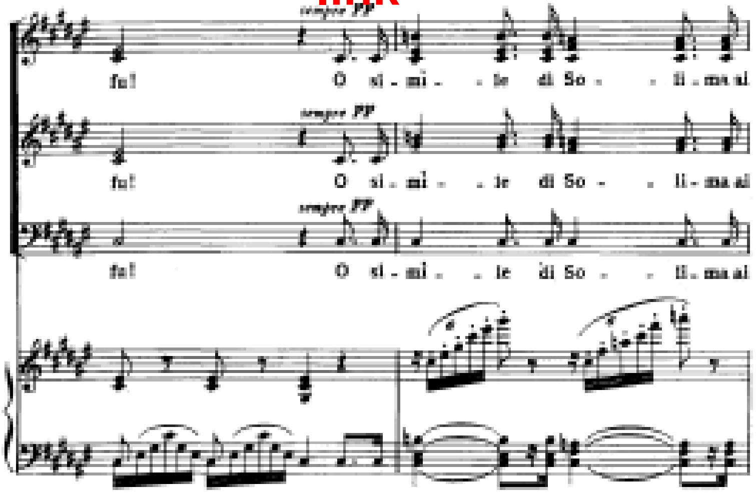

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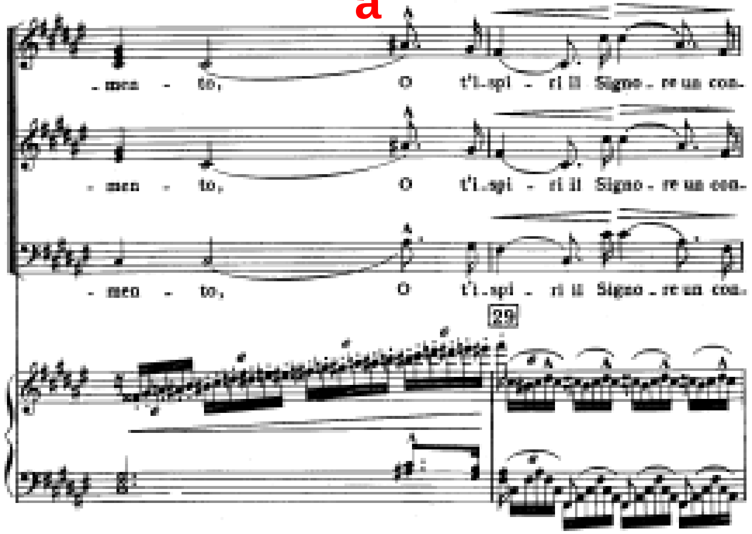

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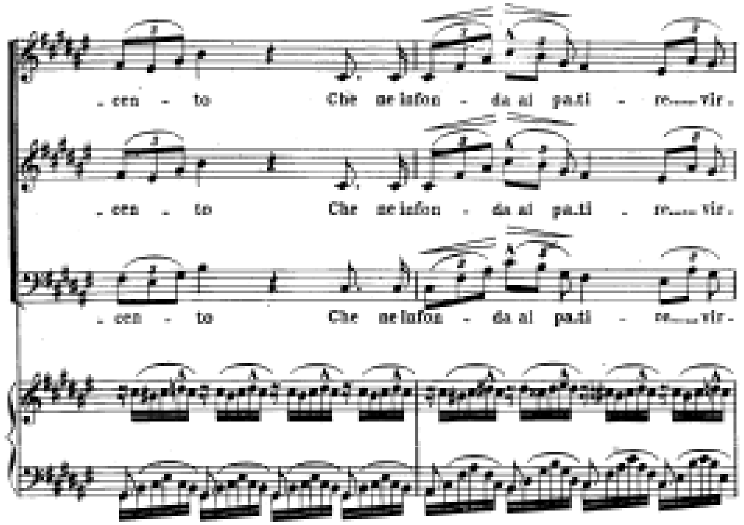
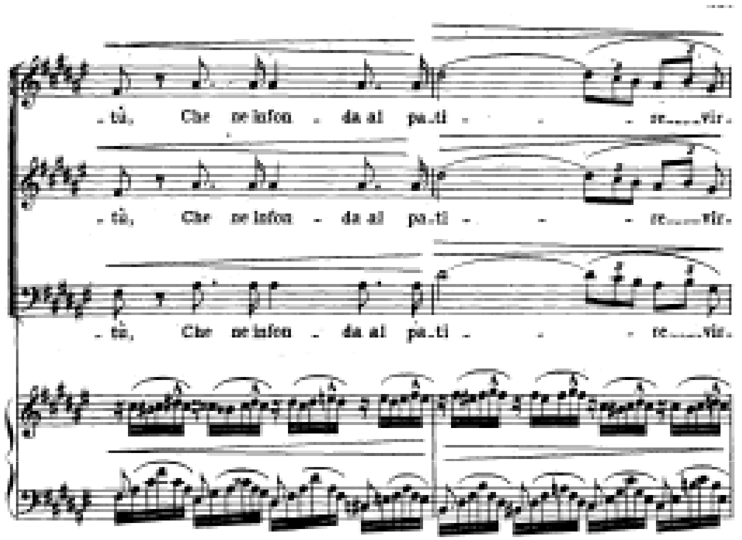
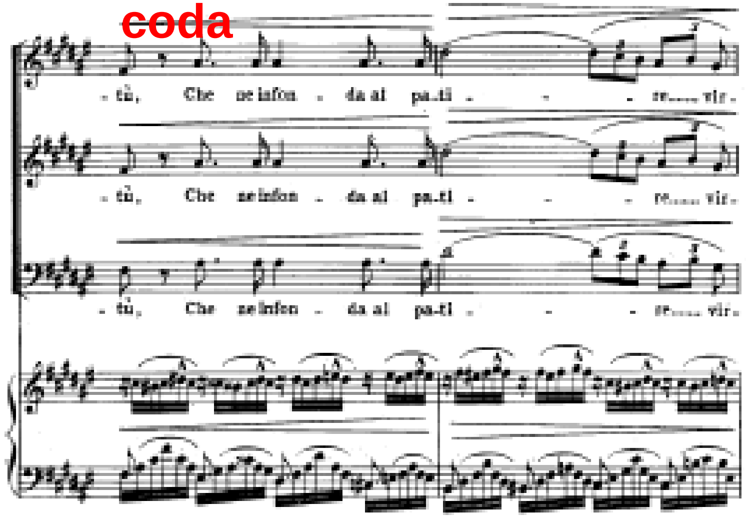
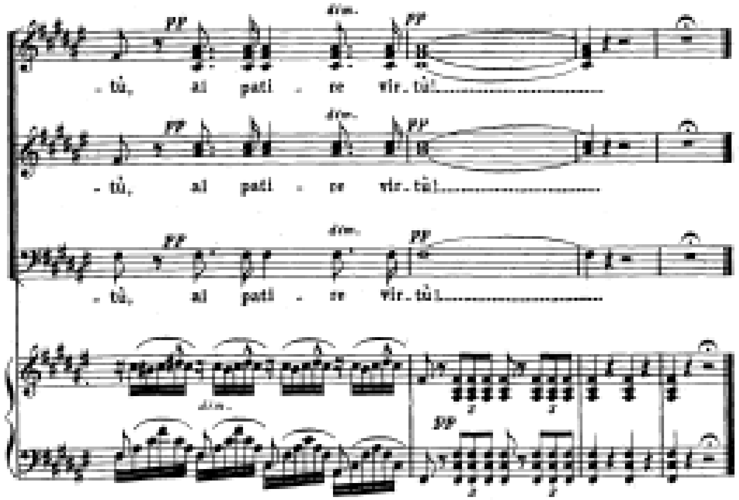




coda





VIVA VERDI!

Verdi =

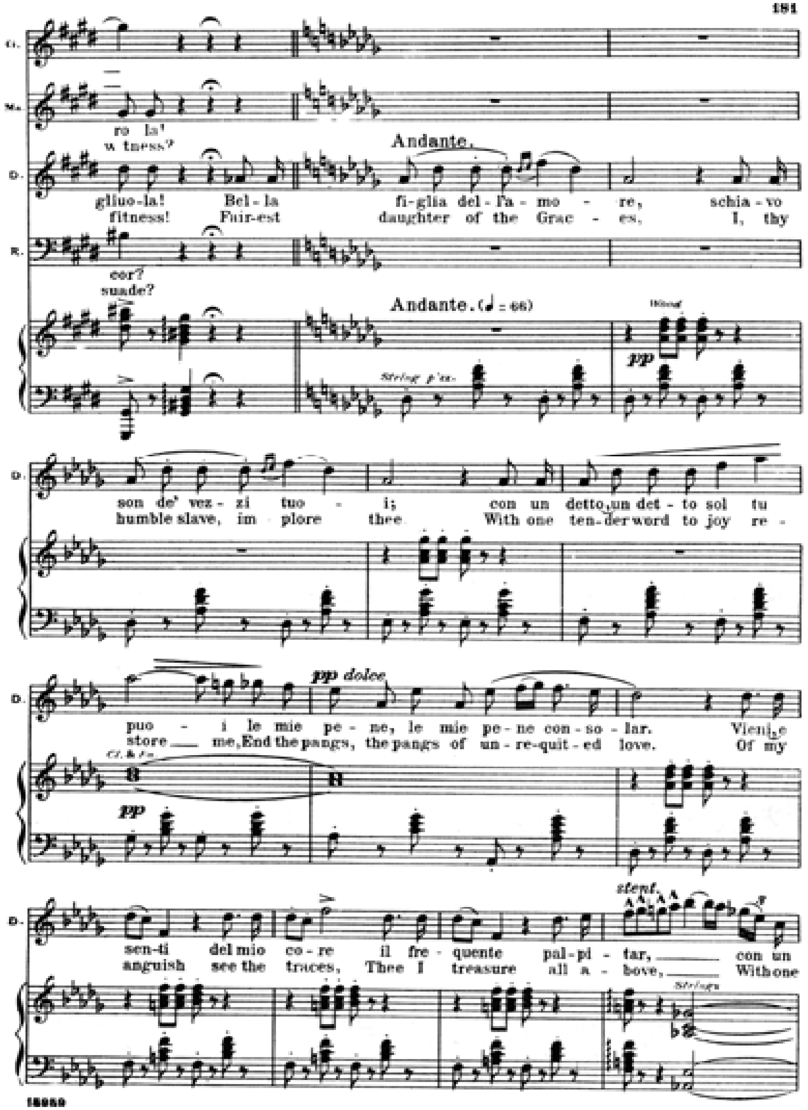
Vittorio
Emanuele
Re
D'
Italia

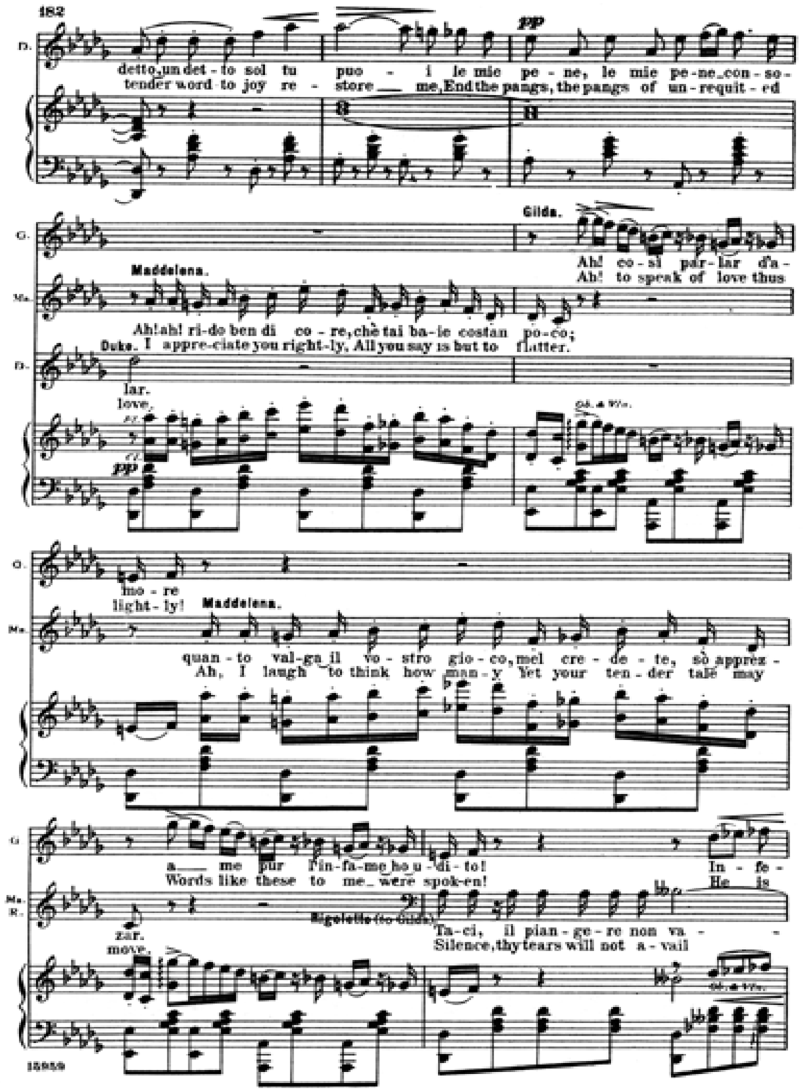
TINTA MUSICALE

- Tinta musicale: lit. musical colour; the distinctive ambience of a particular work, the underlying quality which gives it its individual character
- Term used by Verdi himself in letters, and popularised by Basevi in his influential *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (1859)
- Basevi: tinta may be established by ‘the disposition of the notes, the use of harmony, the choice of instruments, etc.’, to which could be added rhythm, metre, *Affekt*
- Tinta is the preferred way today of trying to grasp the unity of any one Verdian opera, more flexible and therefore more useful than positing recurring pitch-interval relationships or even a large-scale tonal plan (although both these may be found)

RIGOLETTO, ACT III ‘QUARTET’ (TWO DUETS)

VERDI, ‘BELLA FIGLIA DELL’AMORE’





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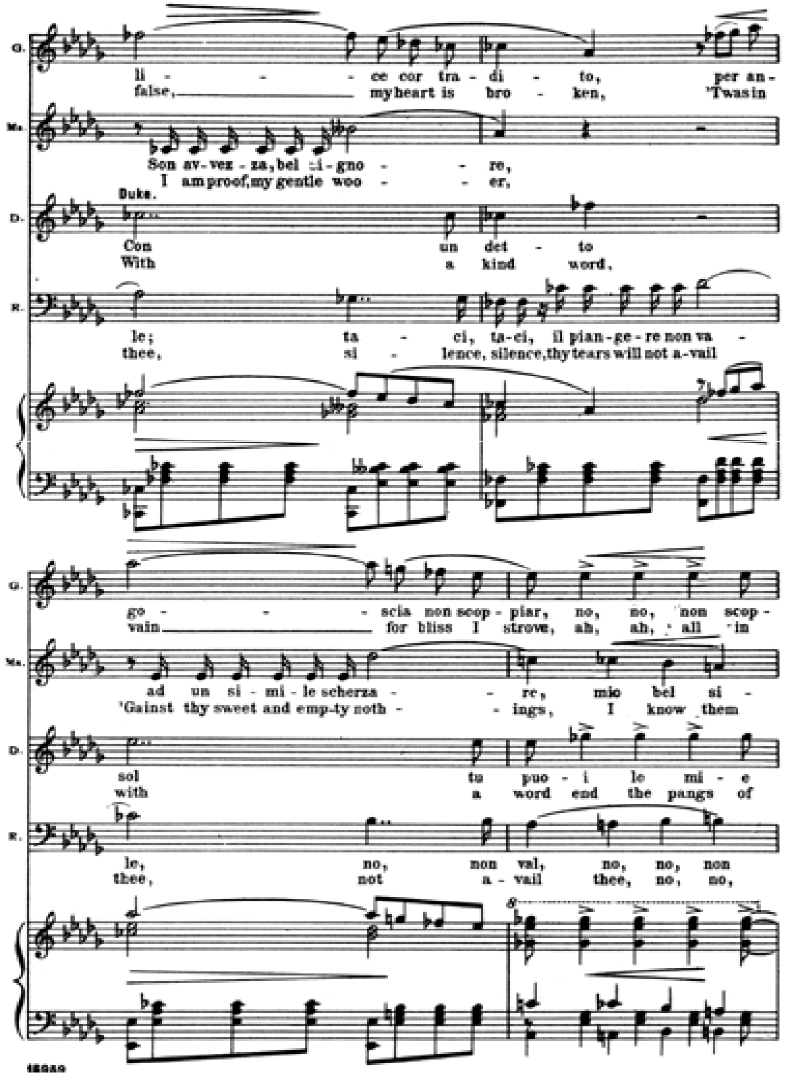

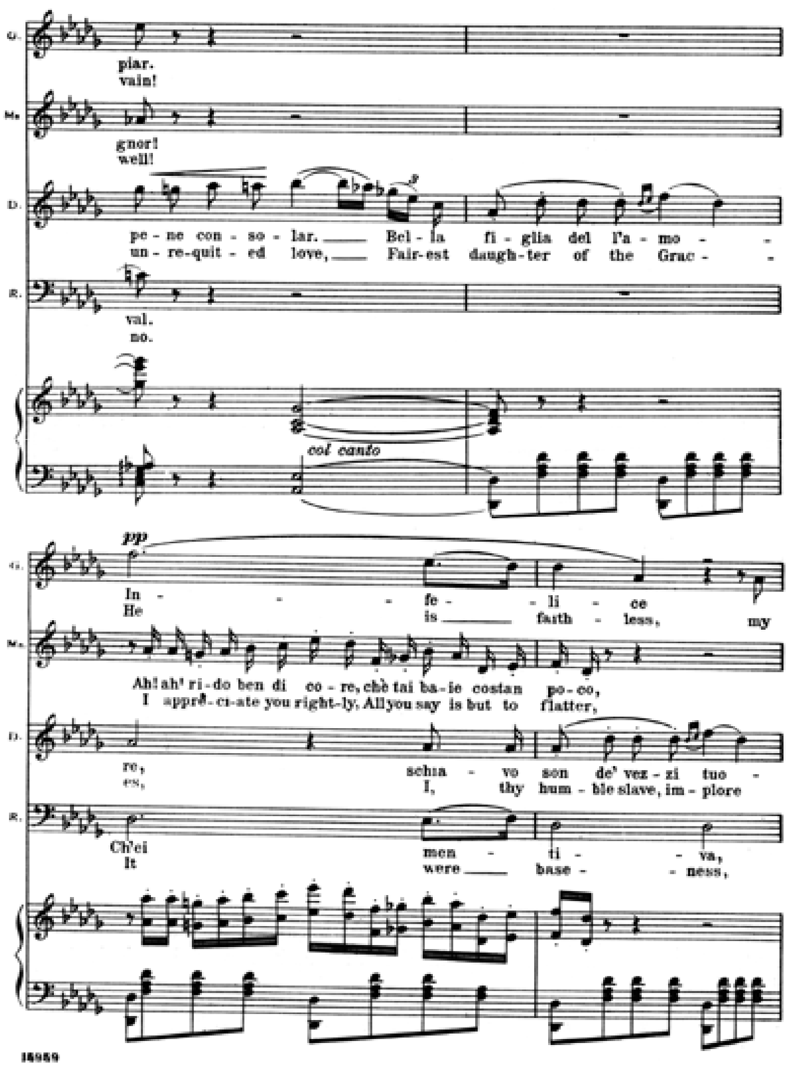

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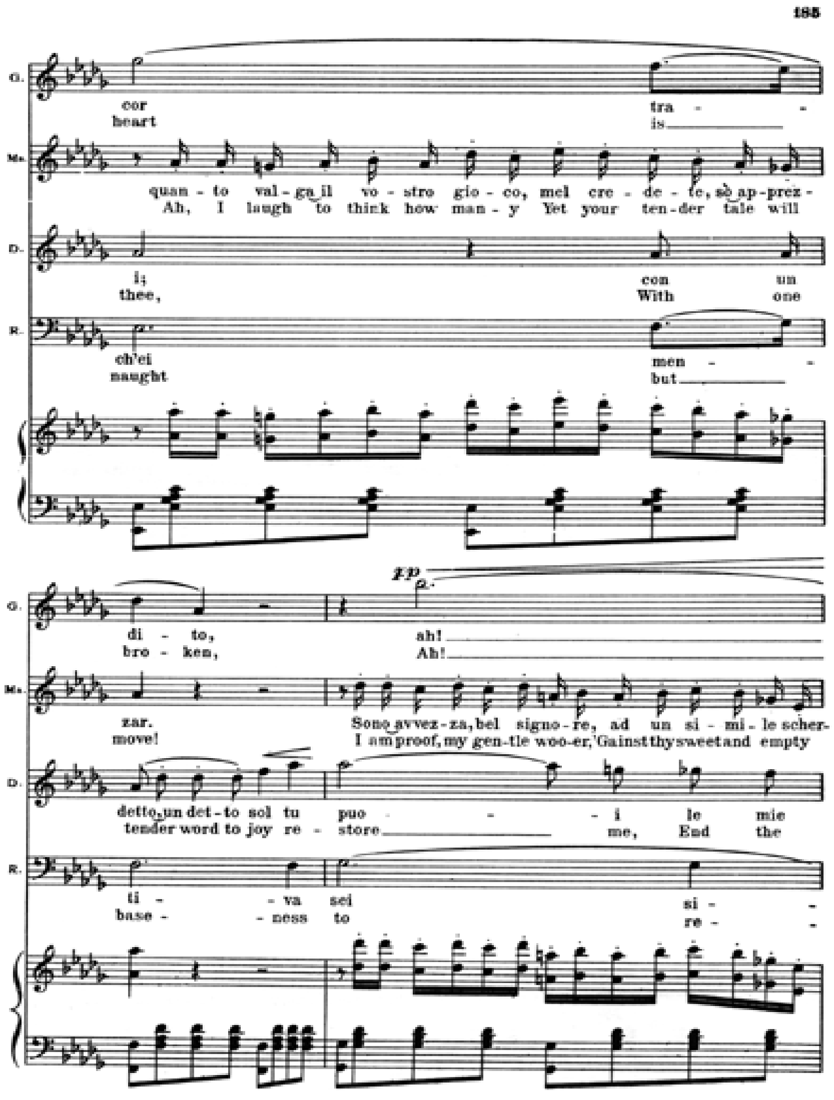

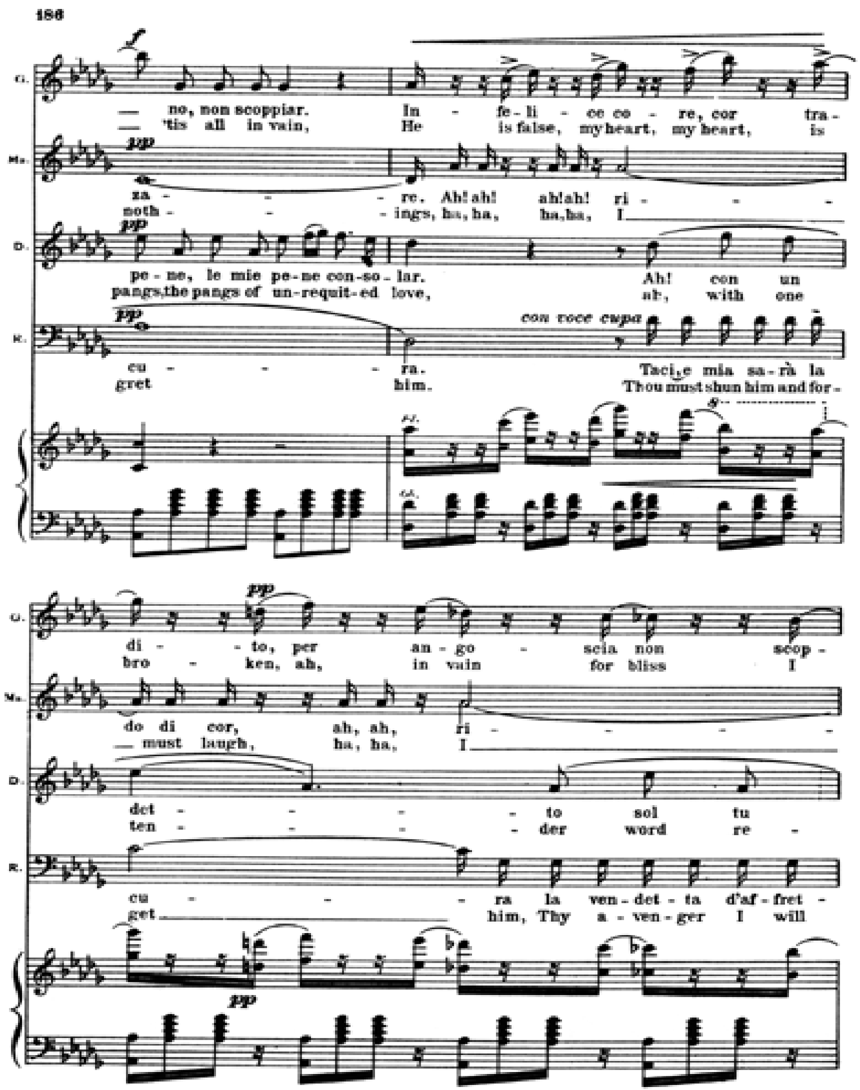

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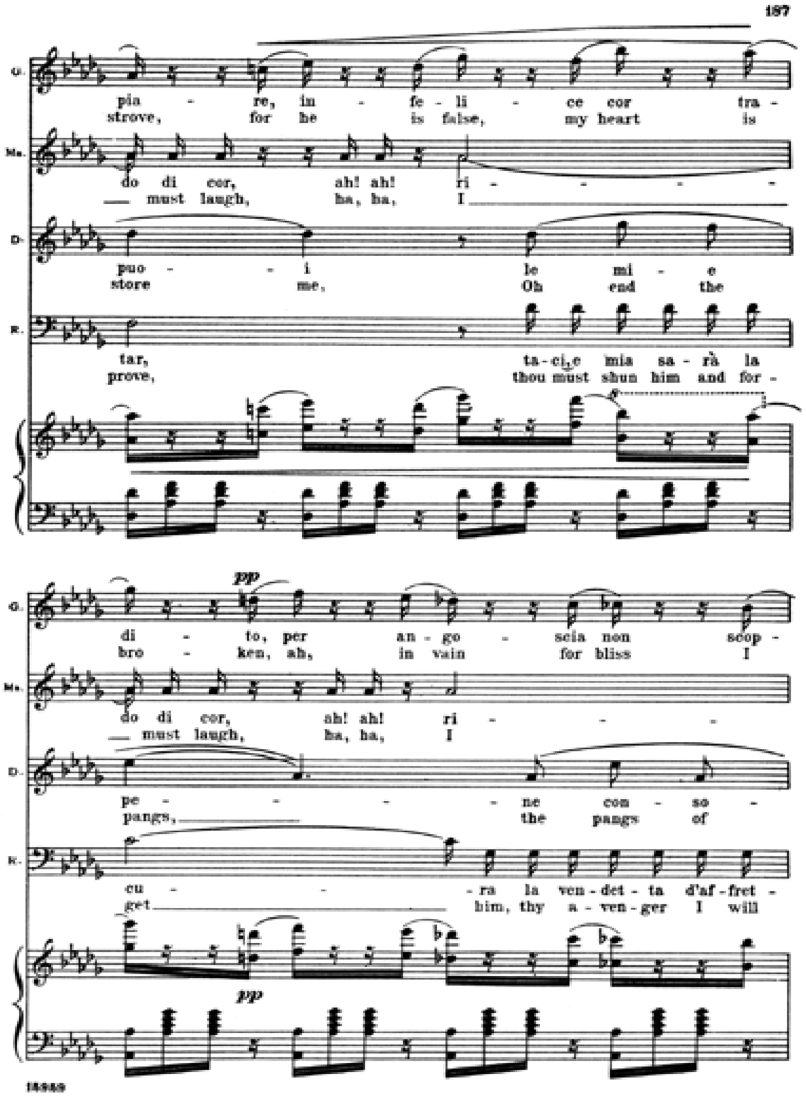

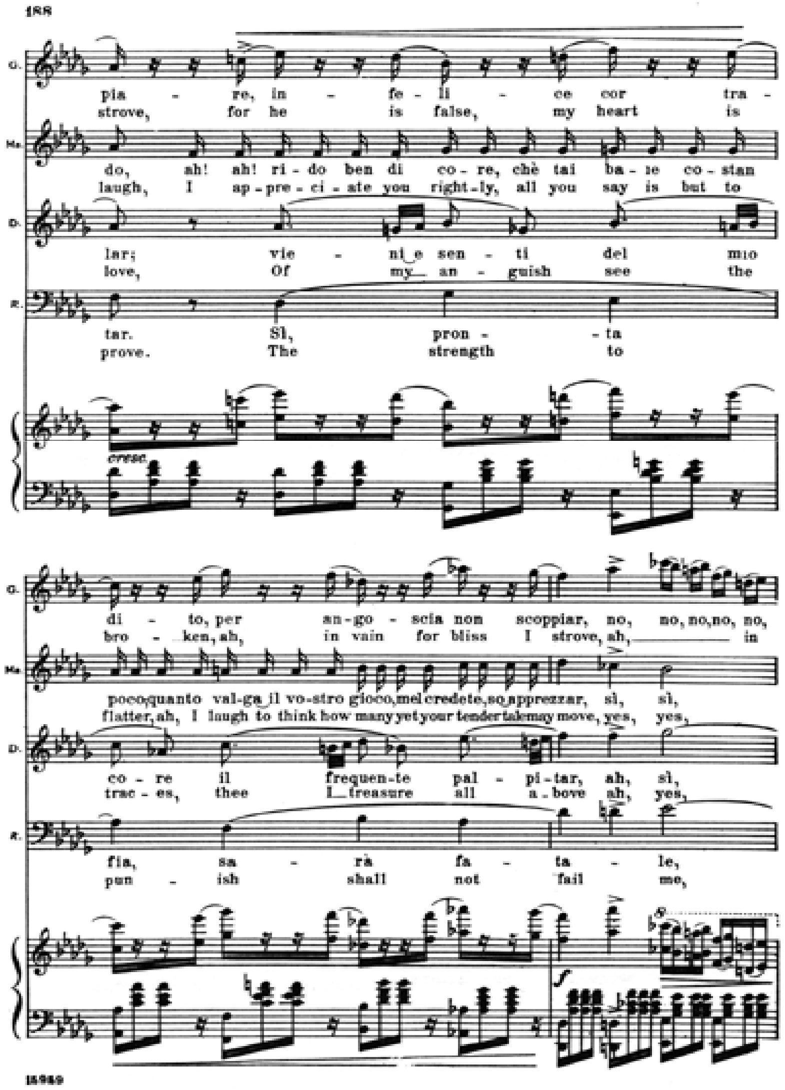

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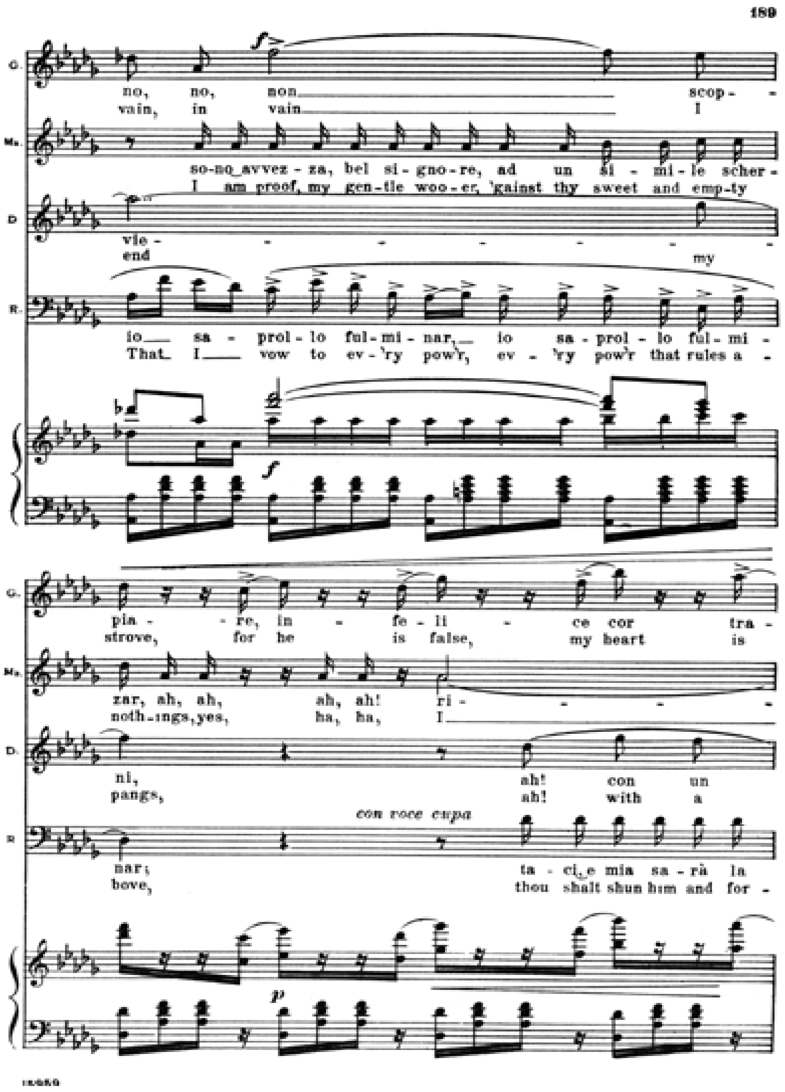

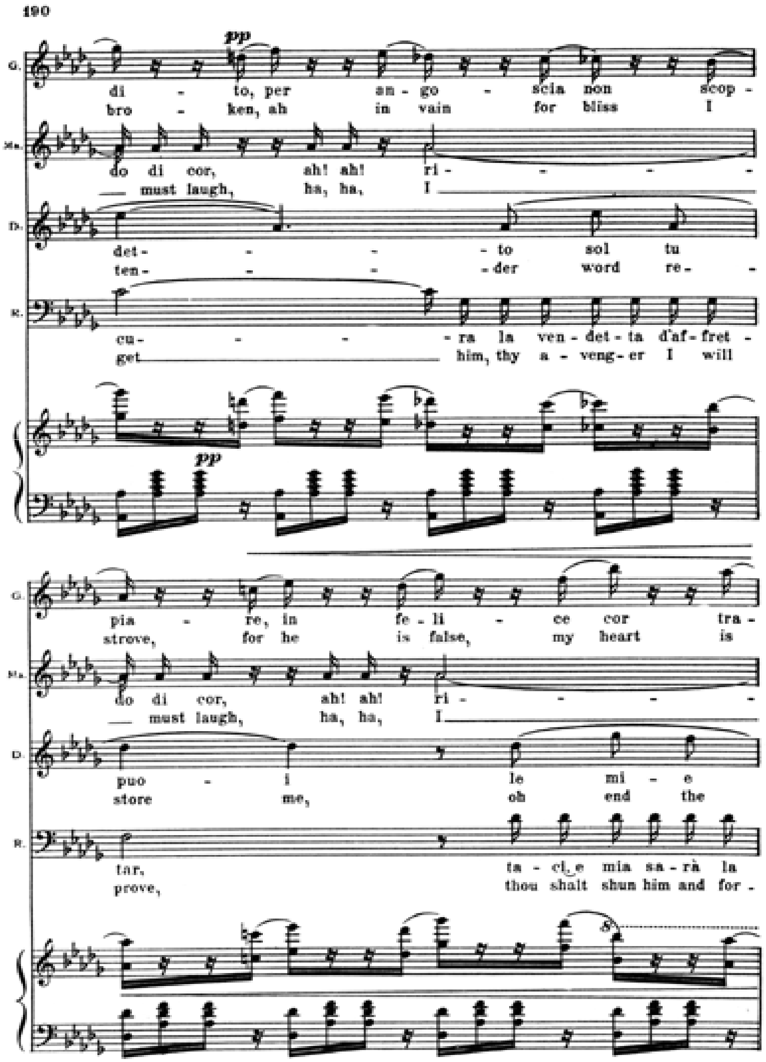

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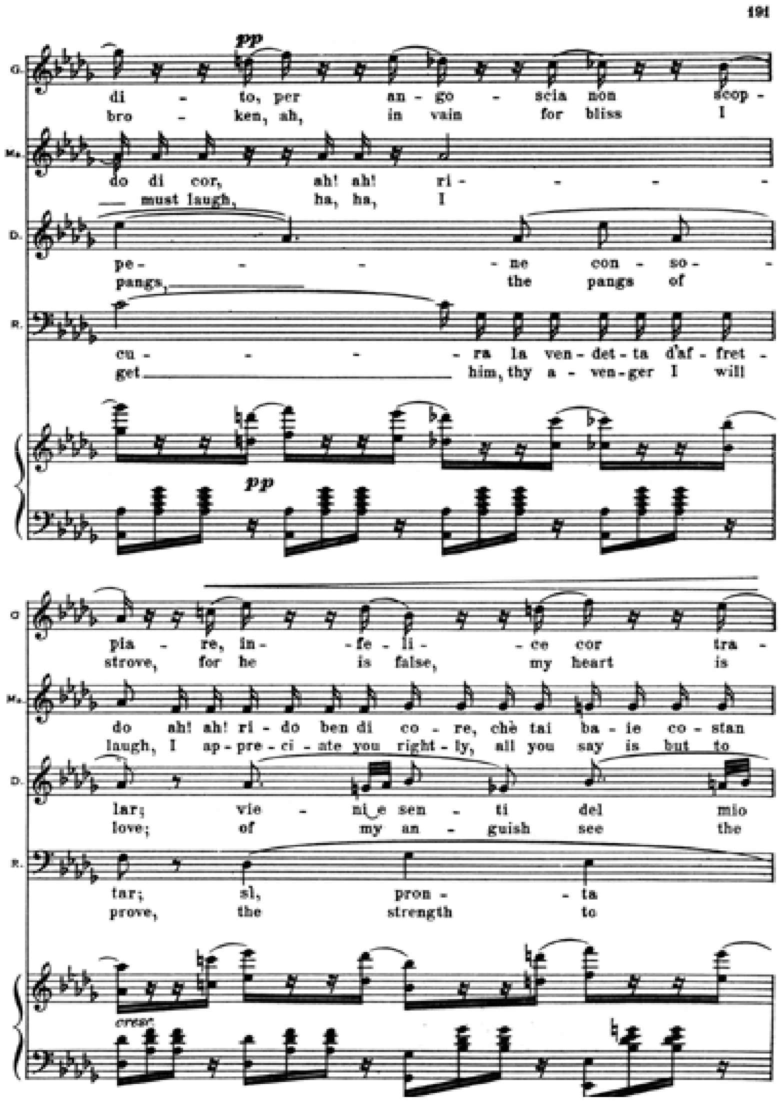

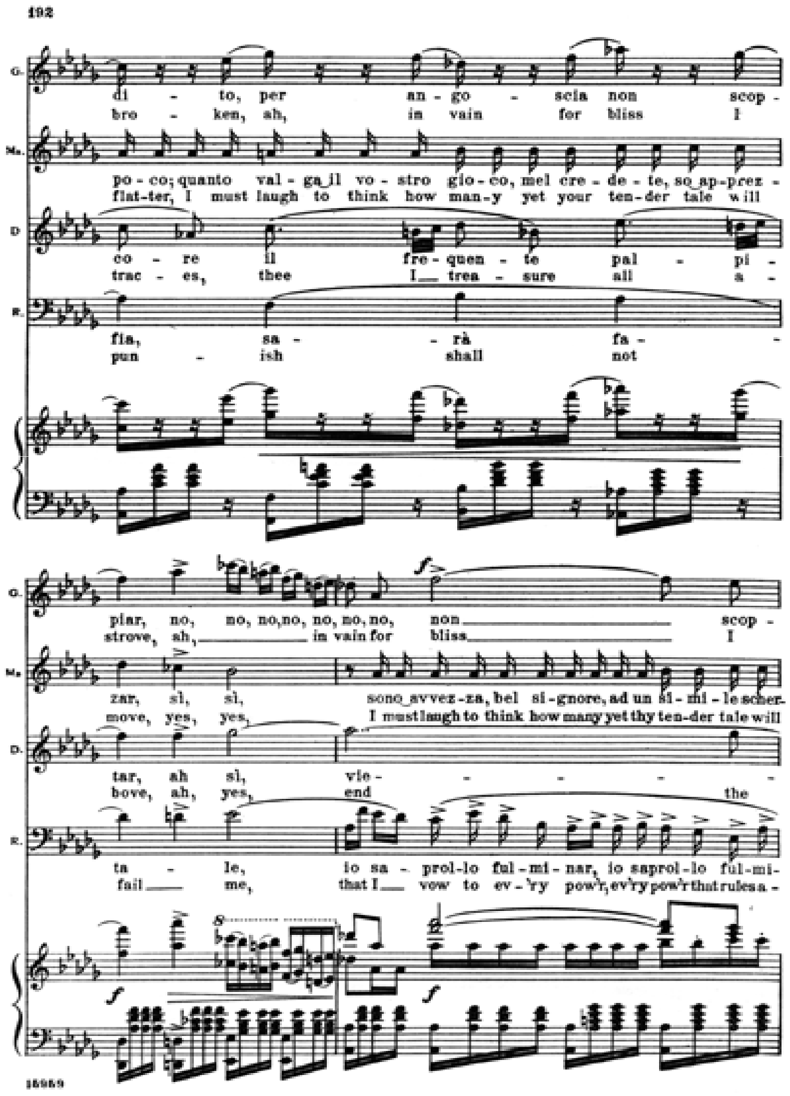

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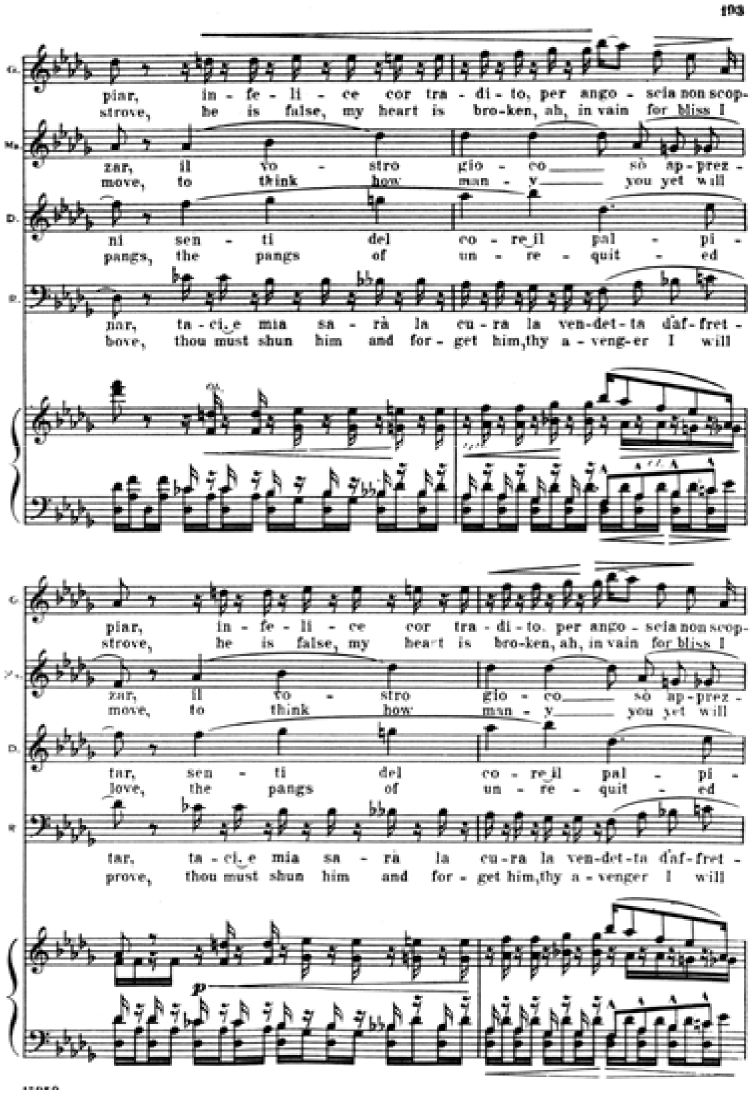

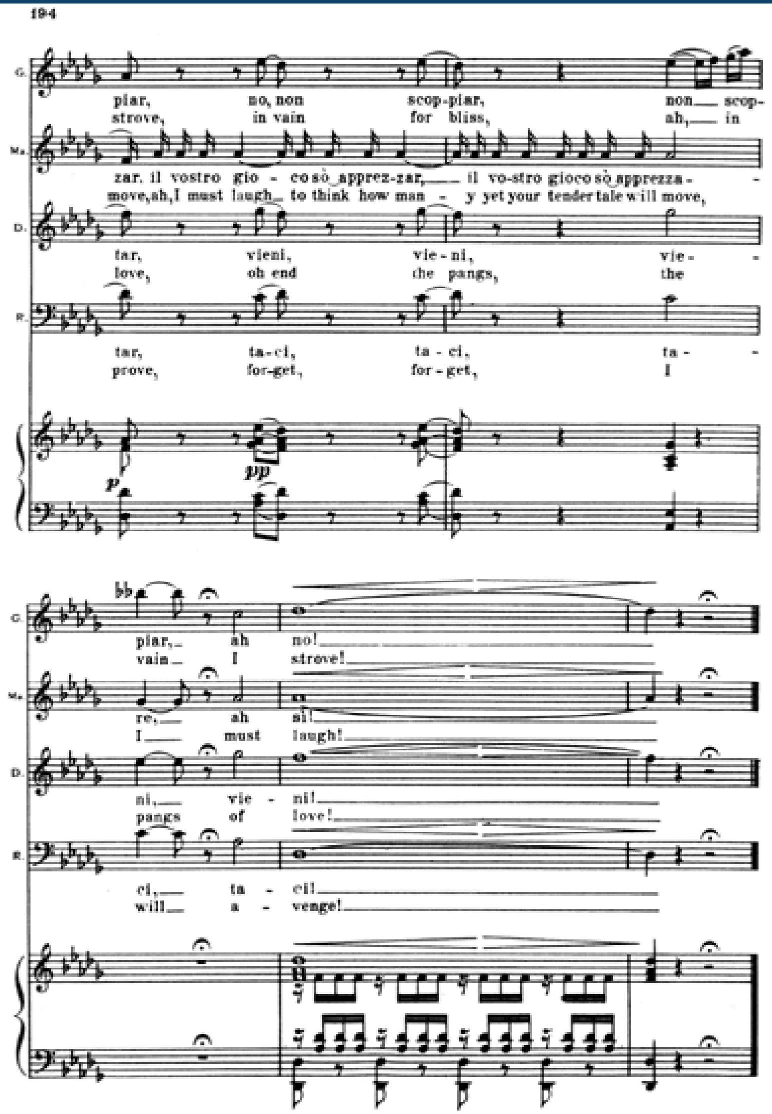

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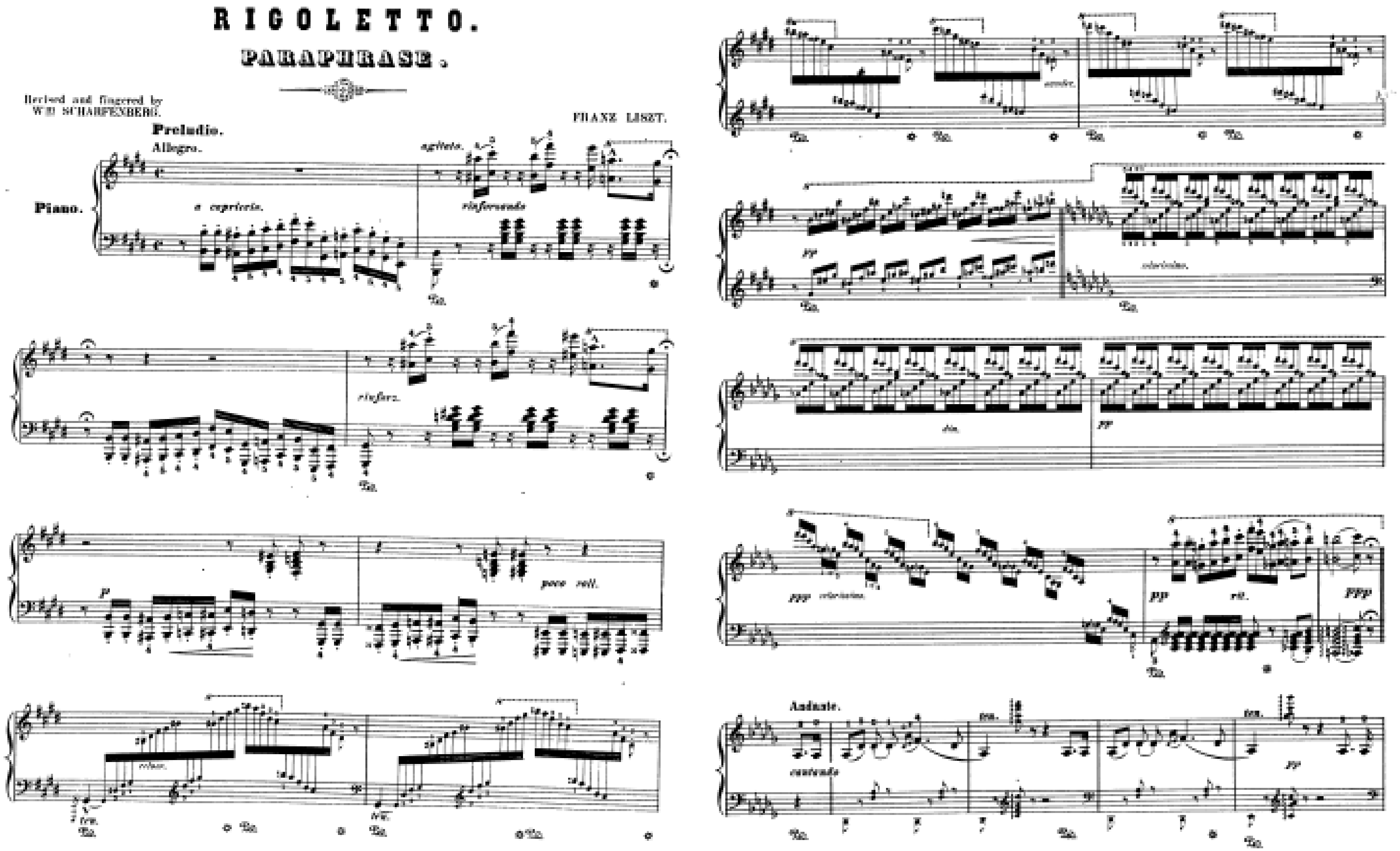
LISZT, *RIGOLETTO* PARAPHRASE



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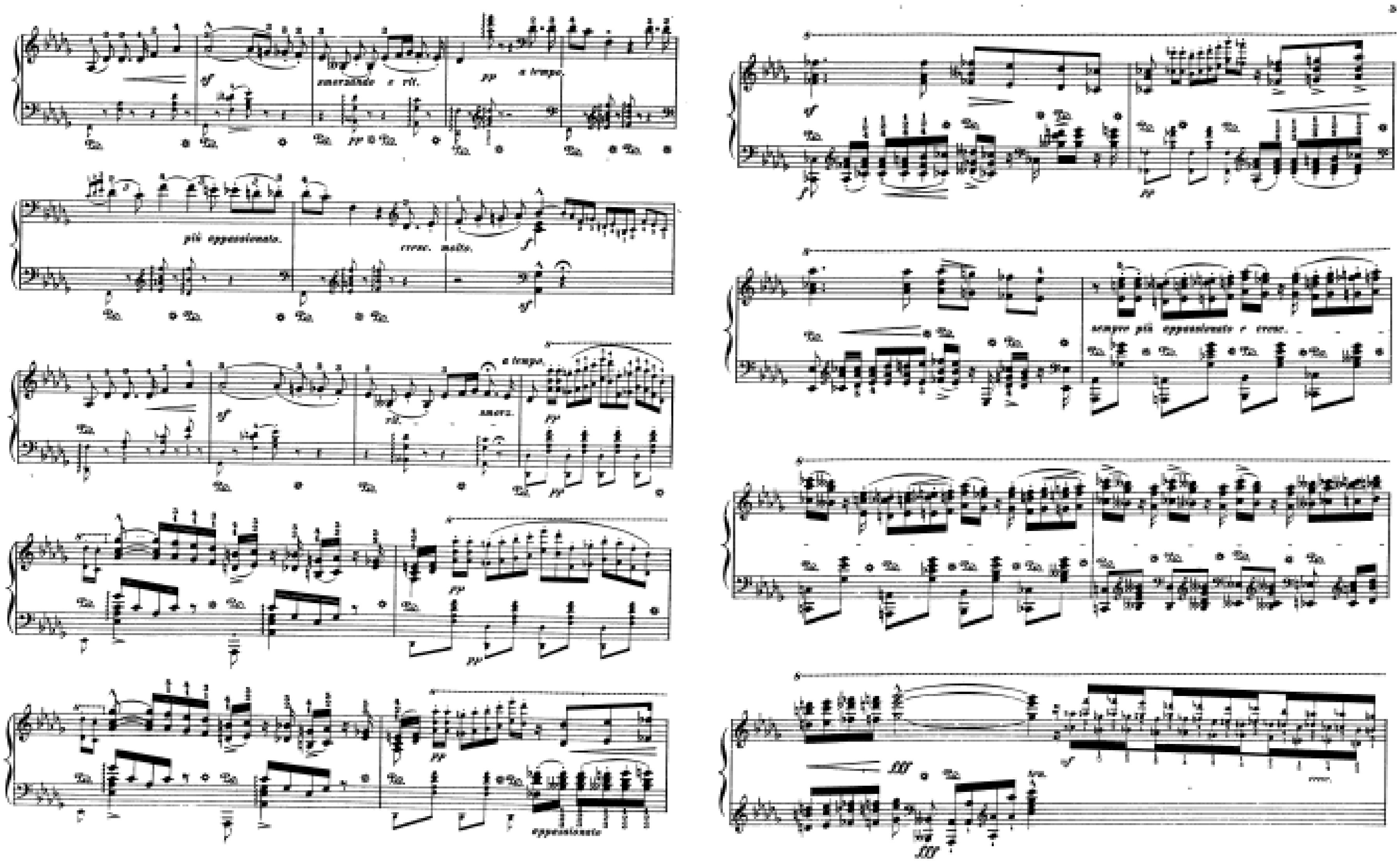

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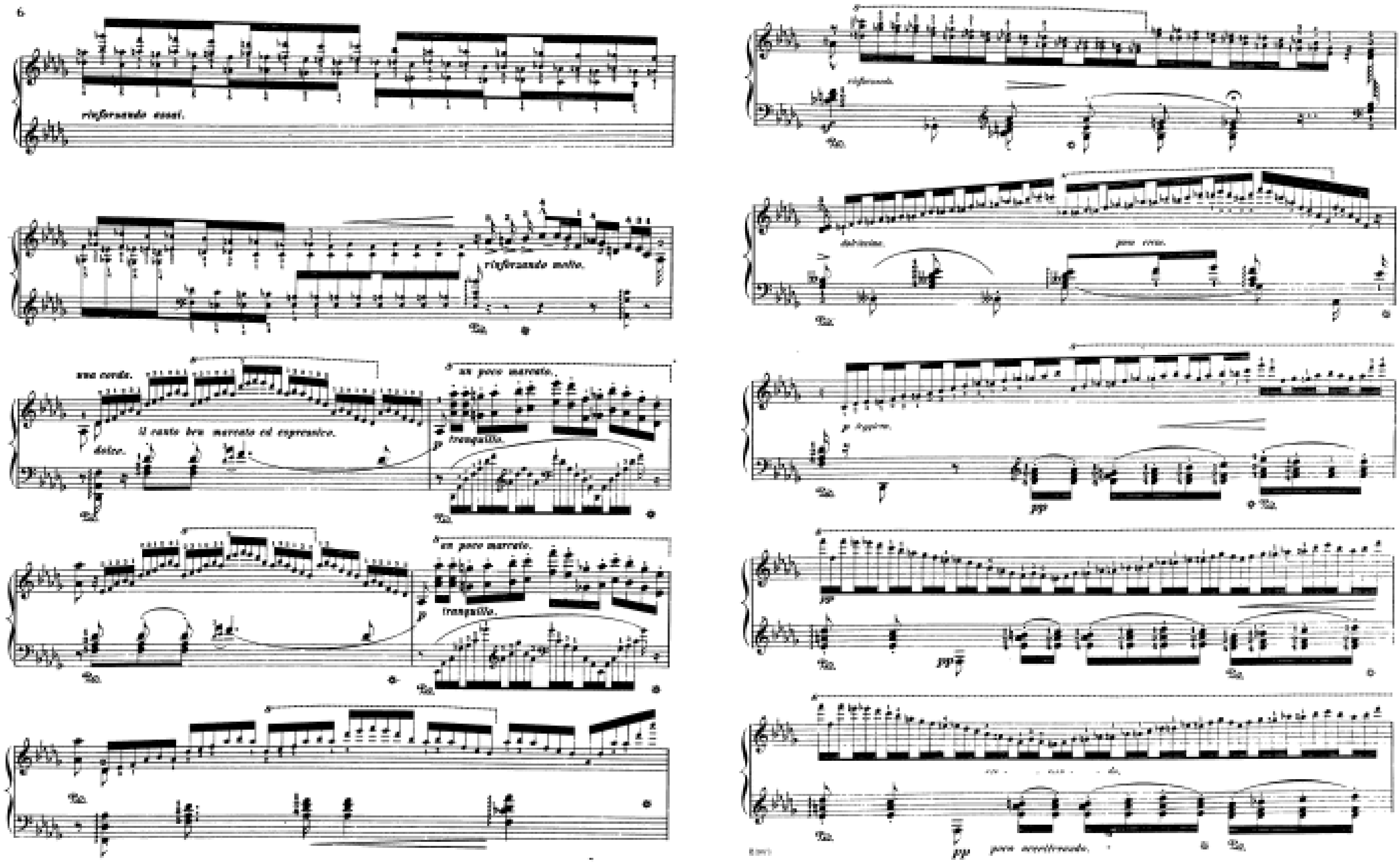

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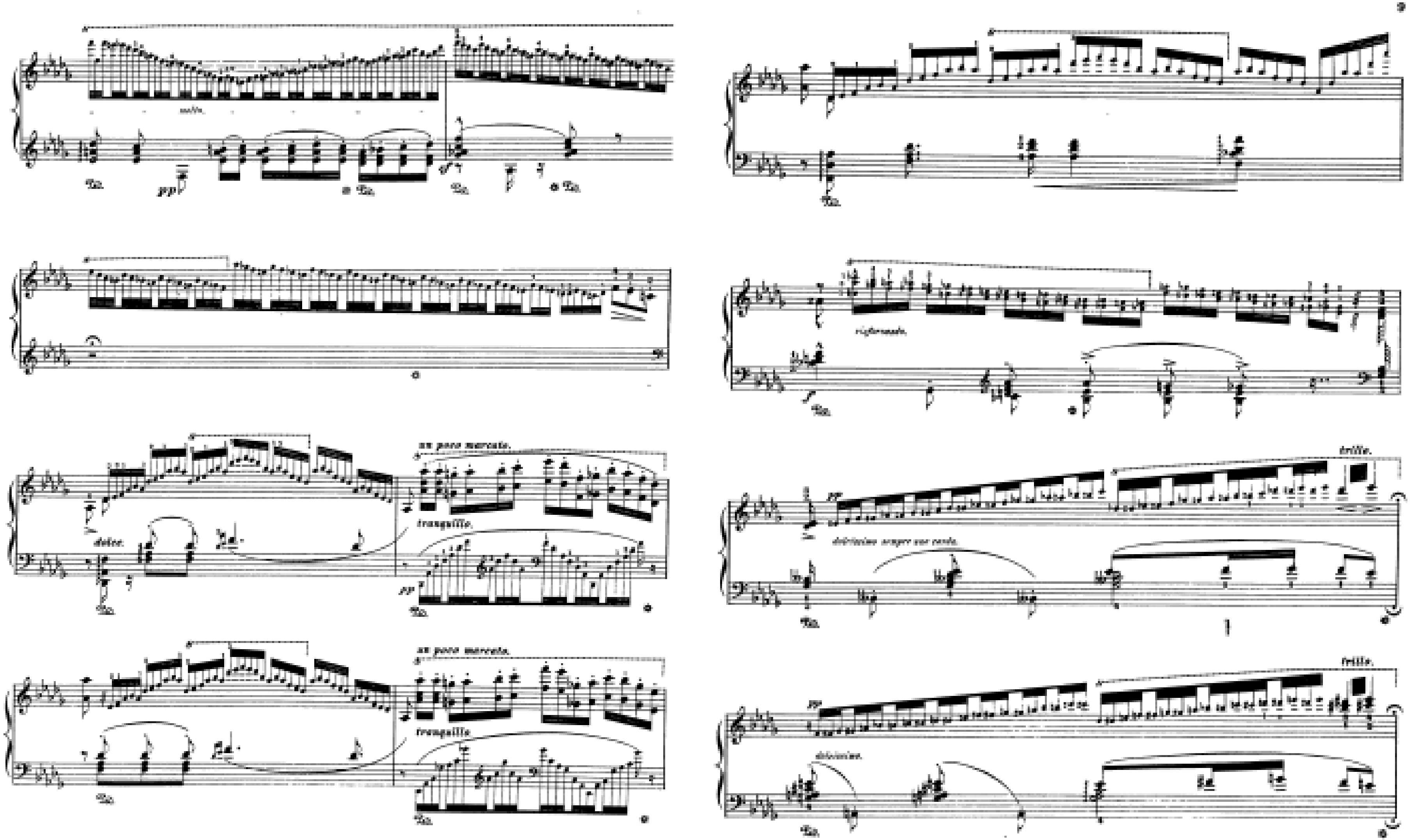

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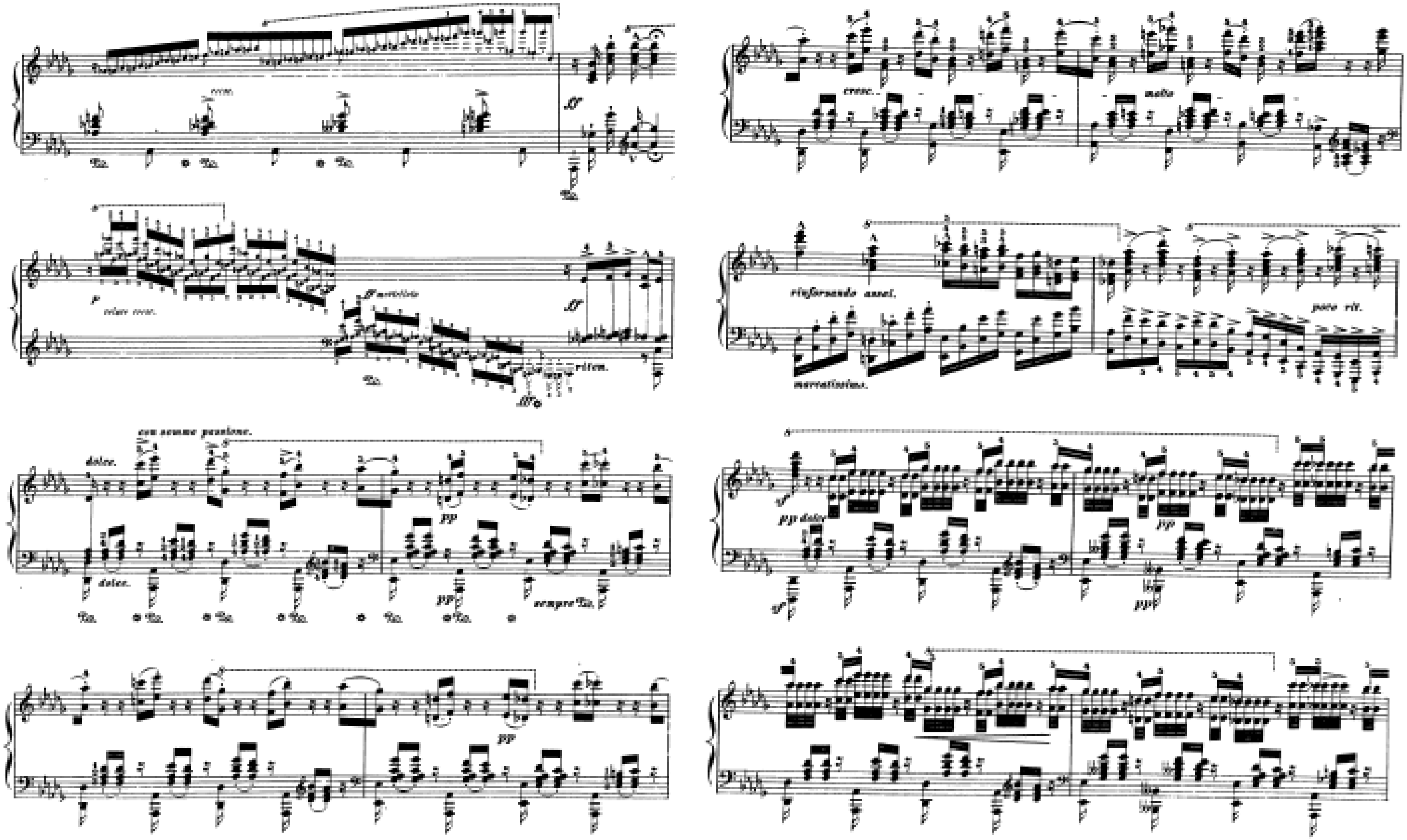

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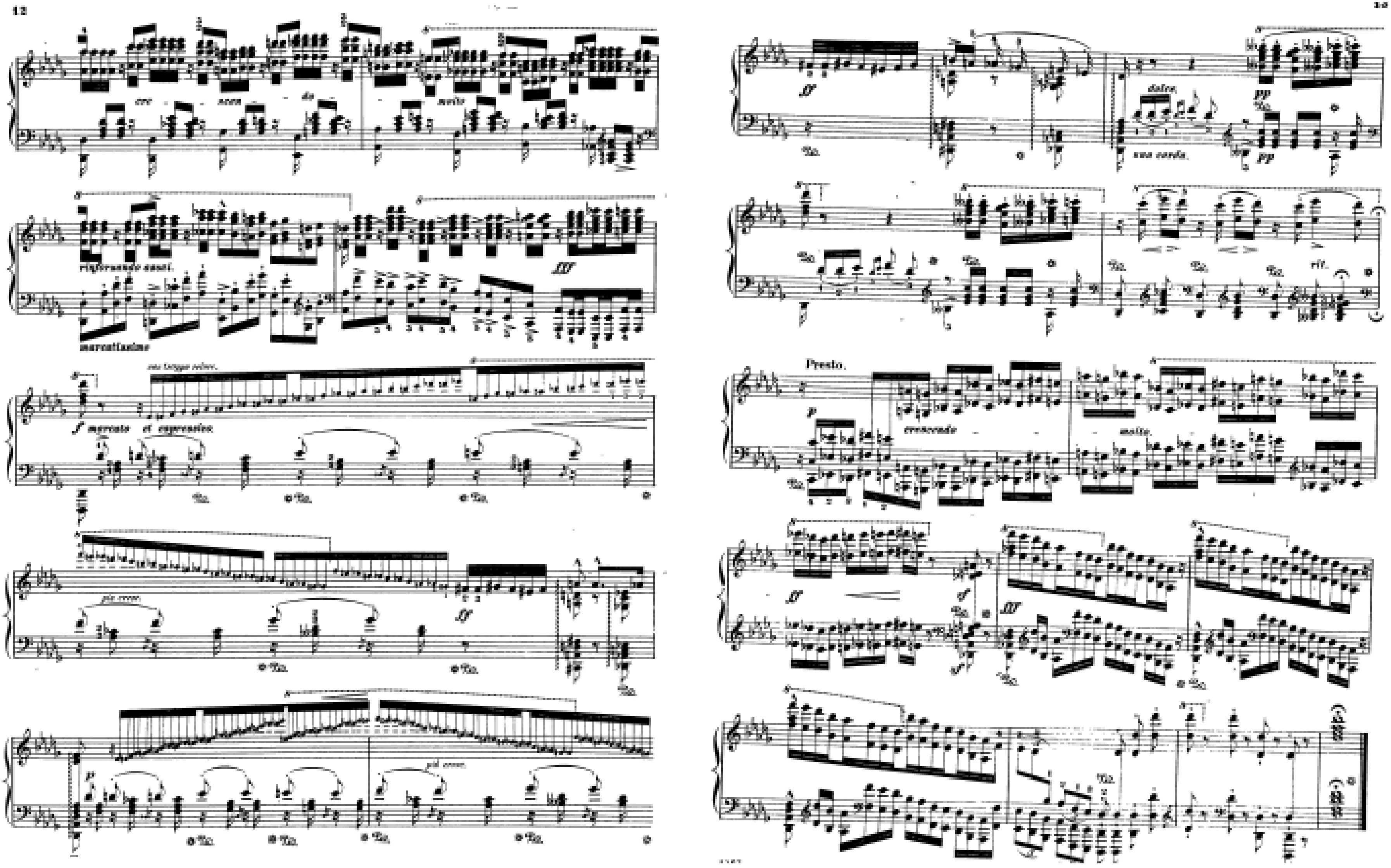
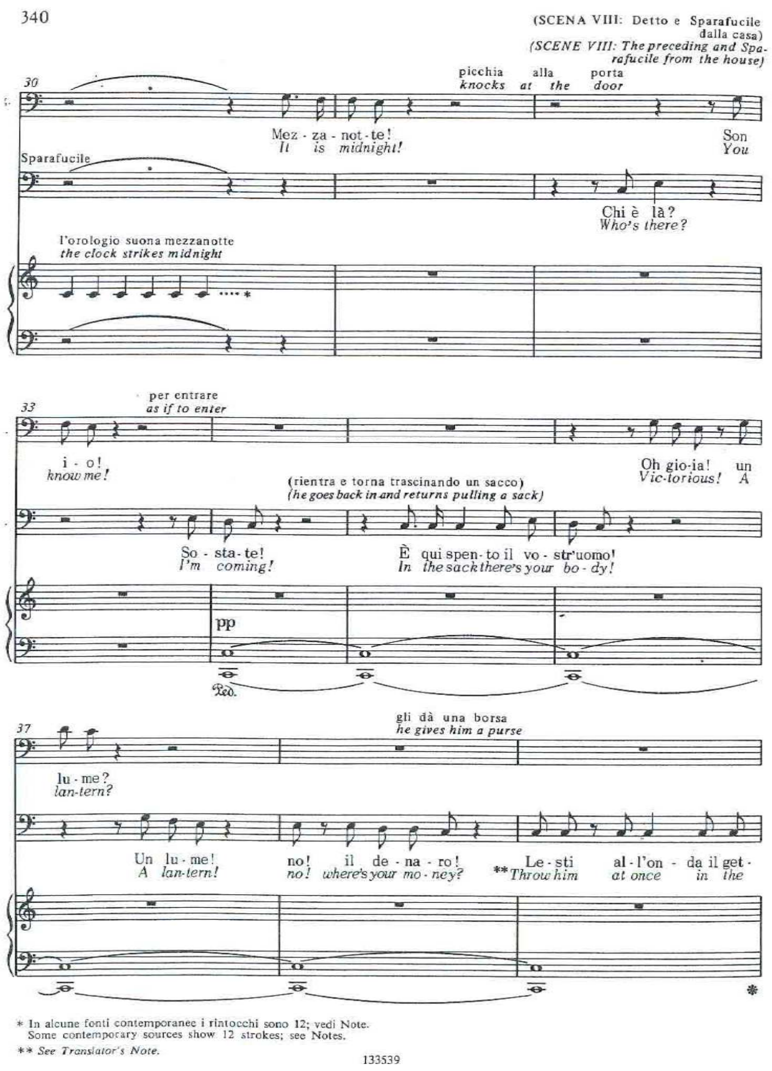
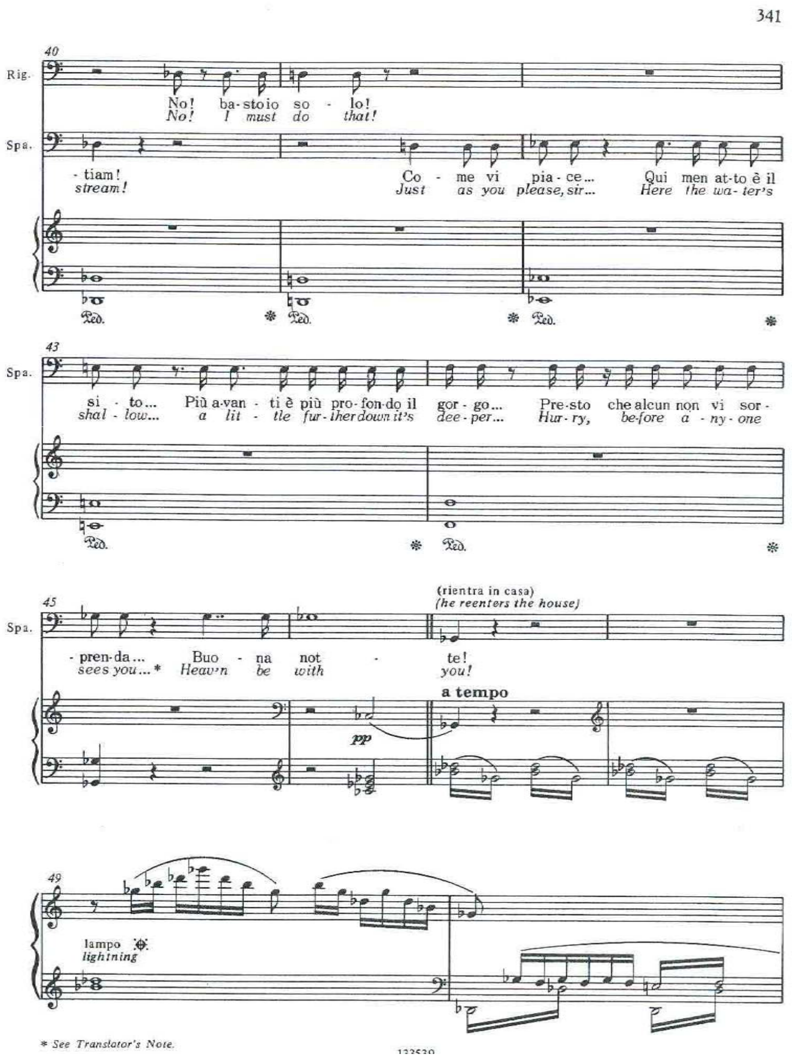


RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION





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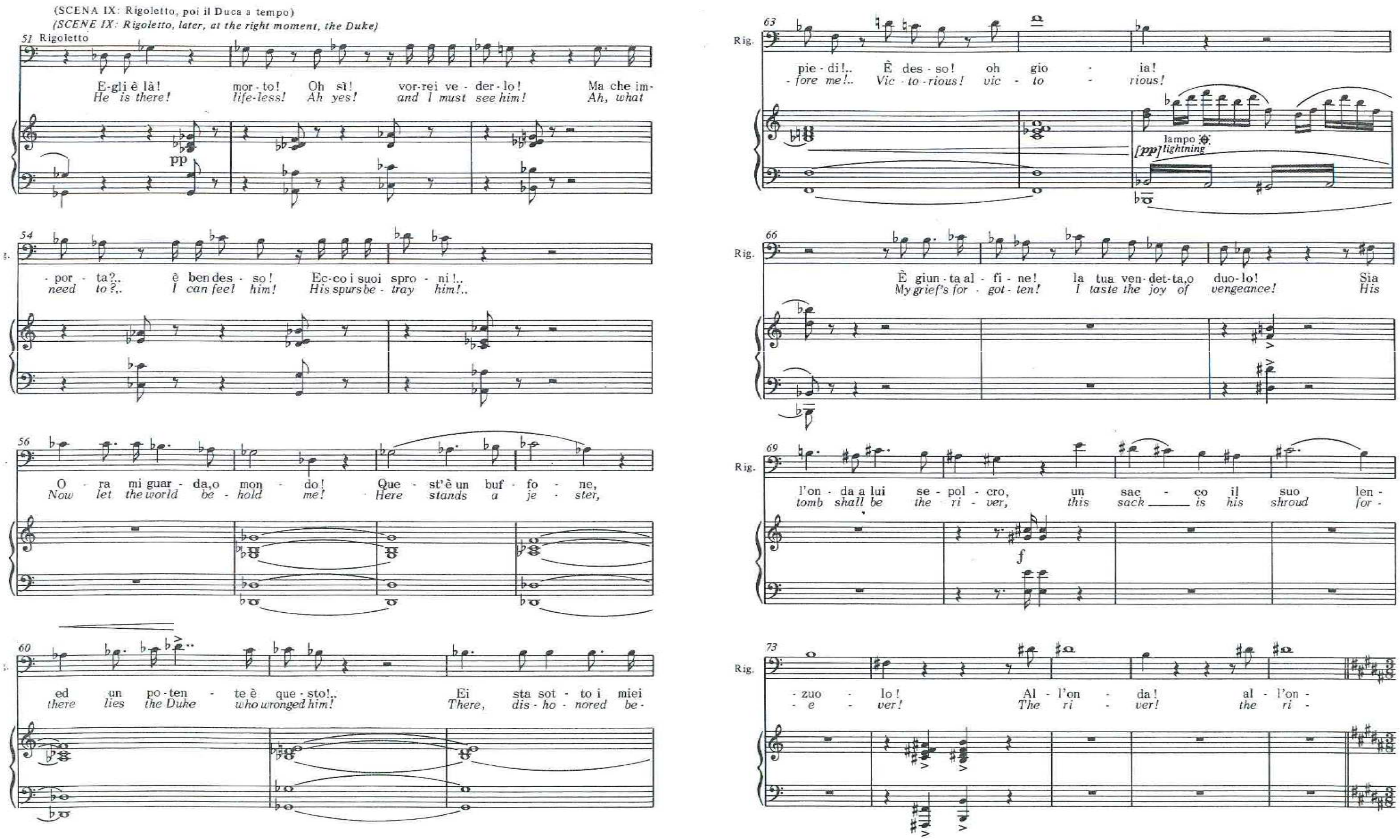

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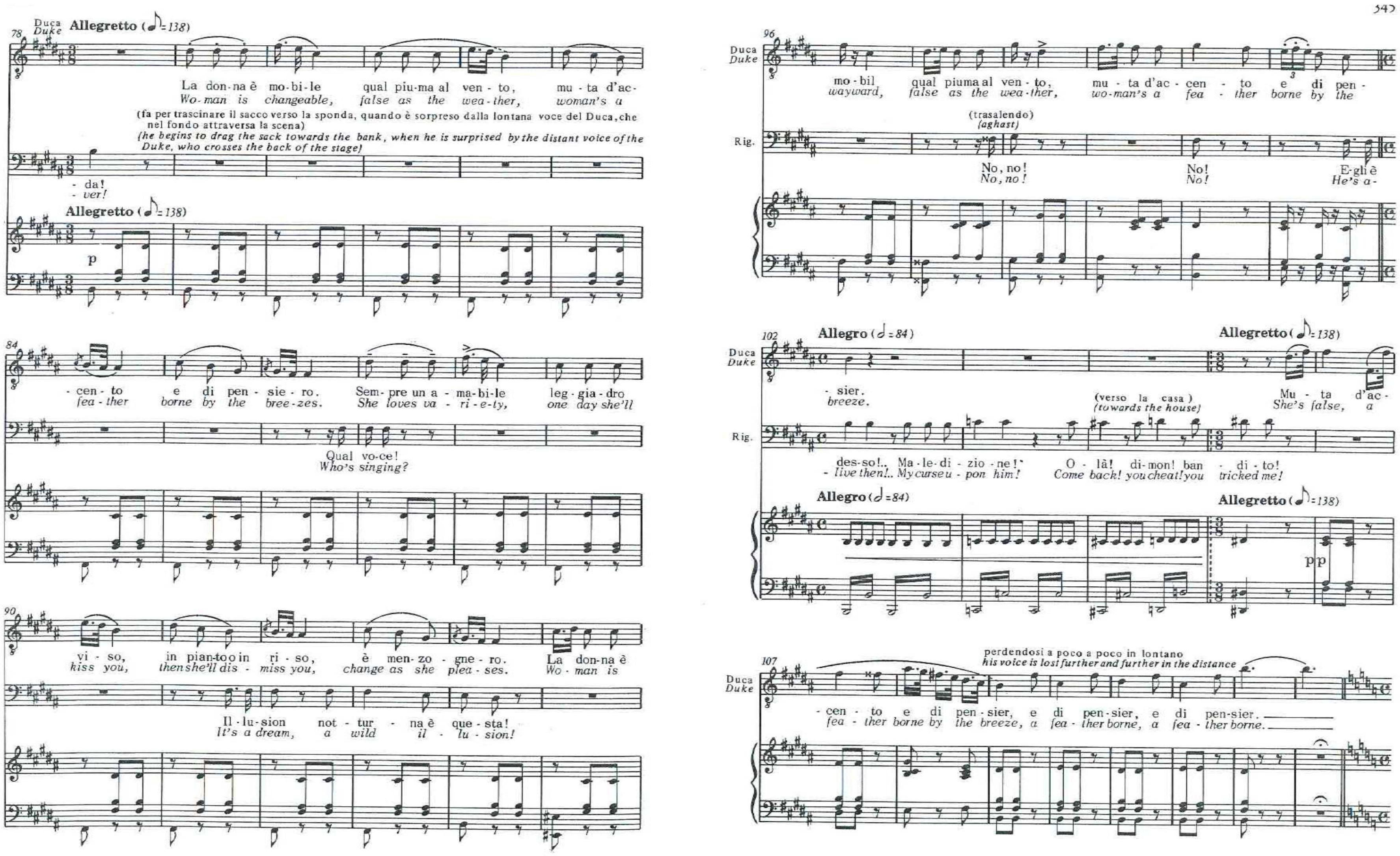

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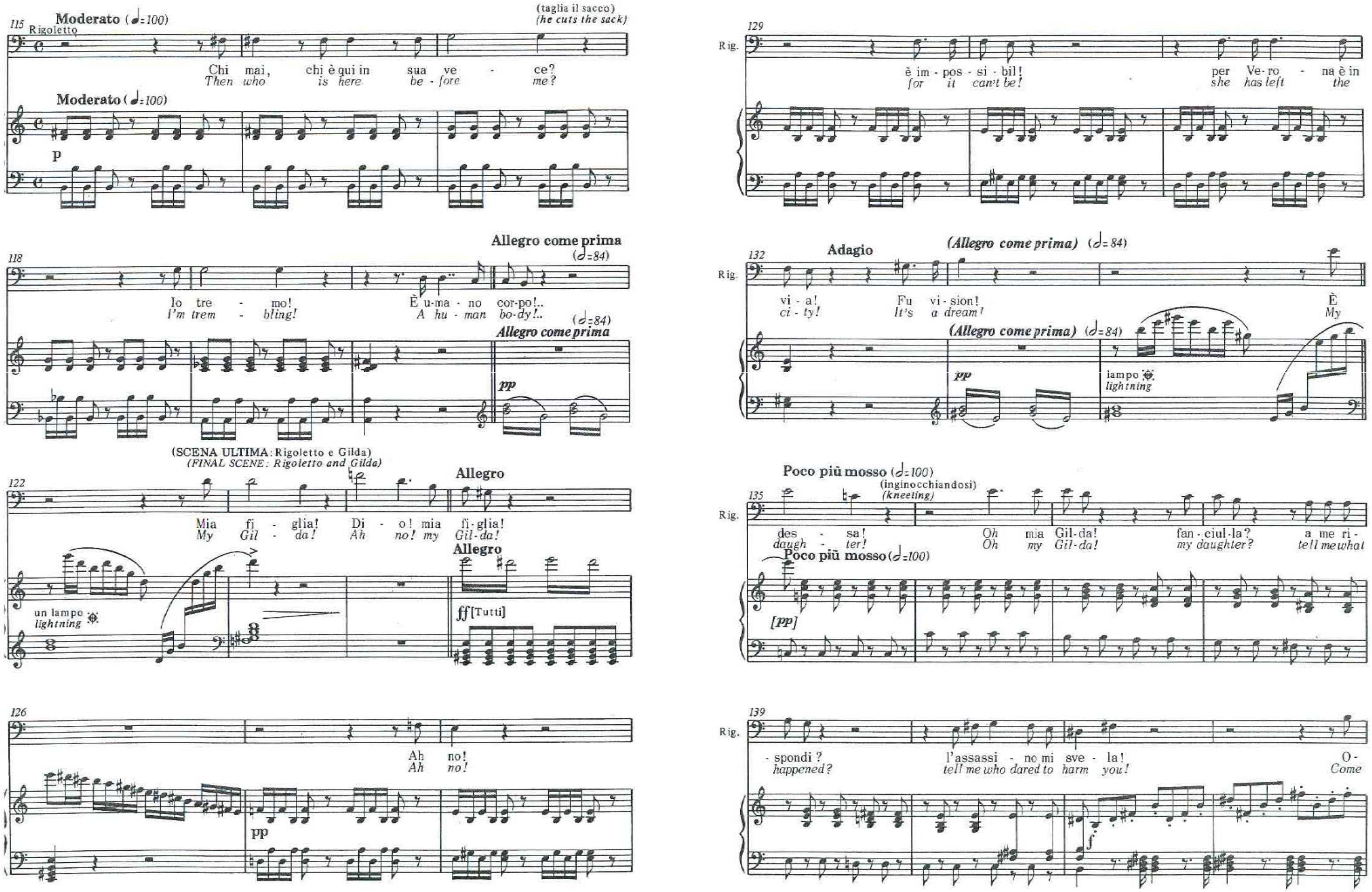
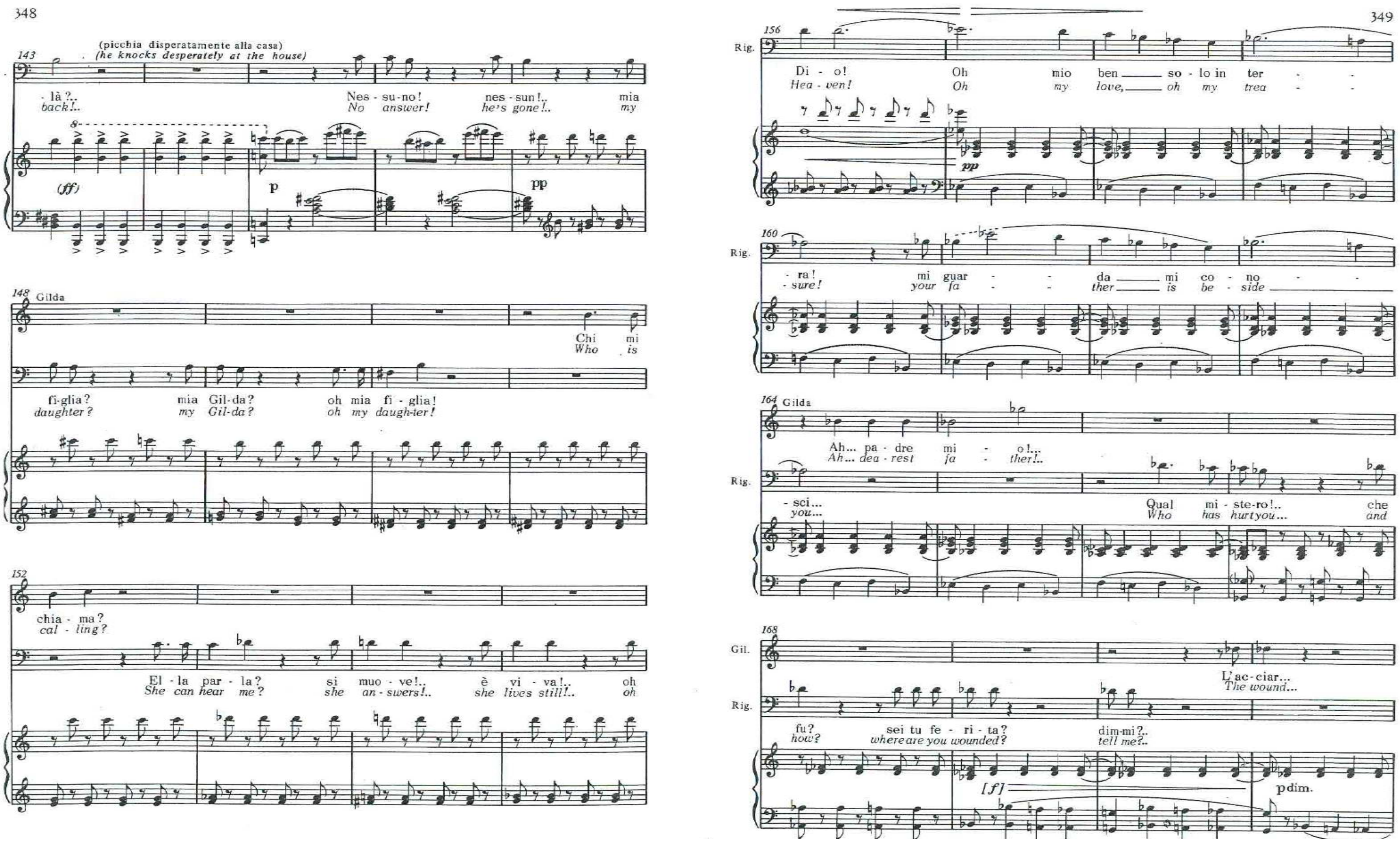
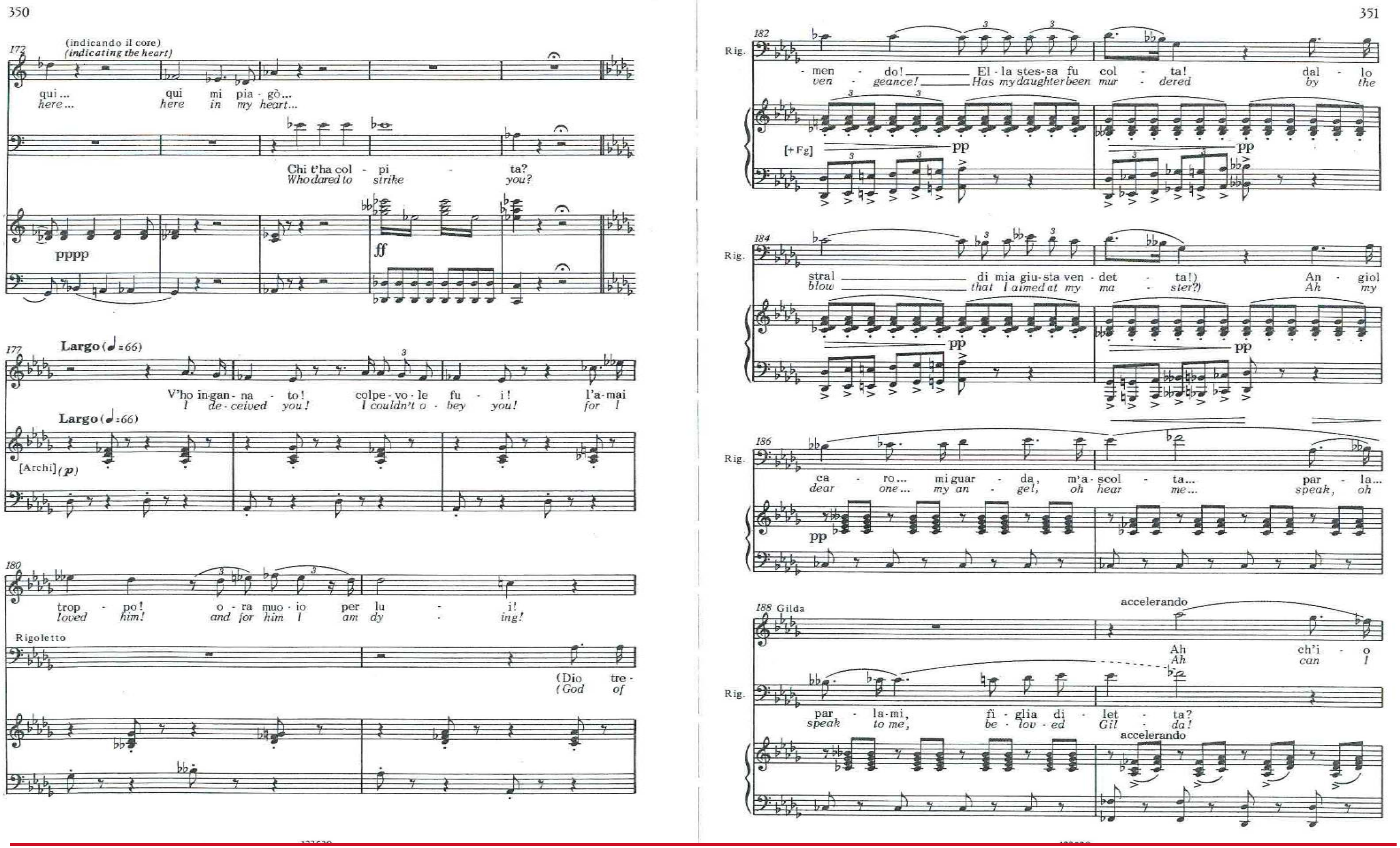


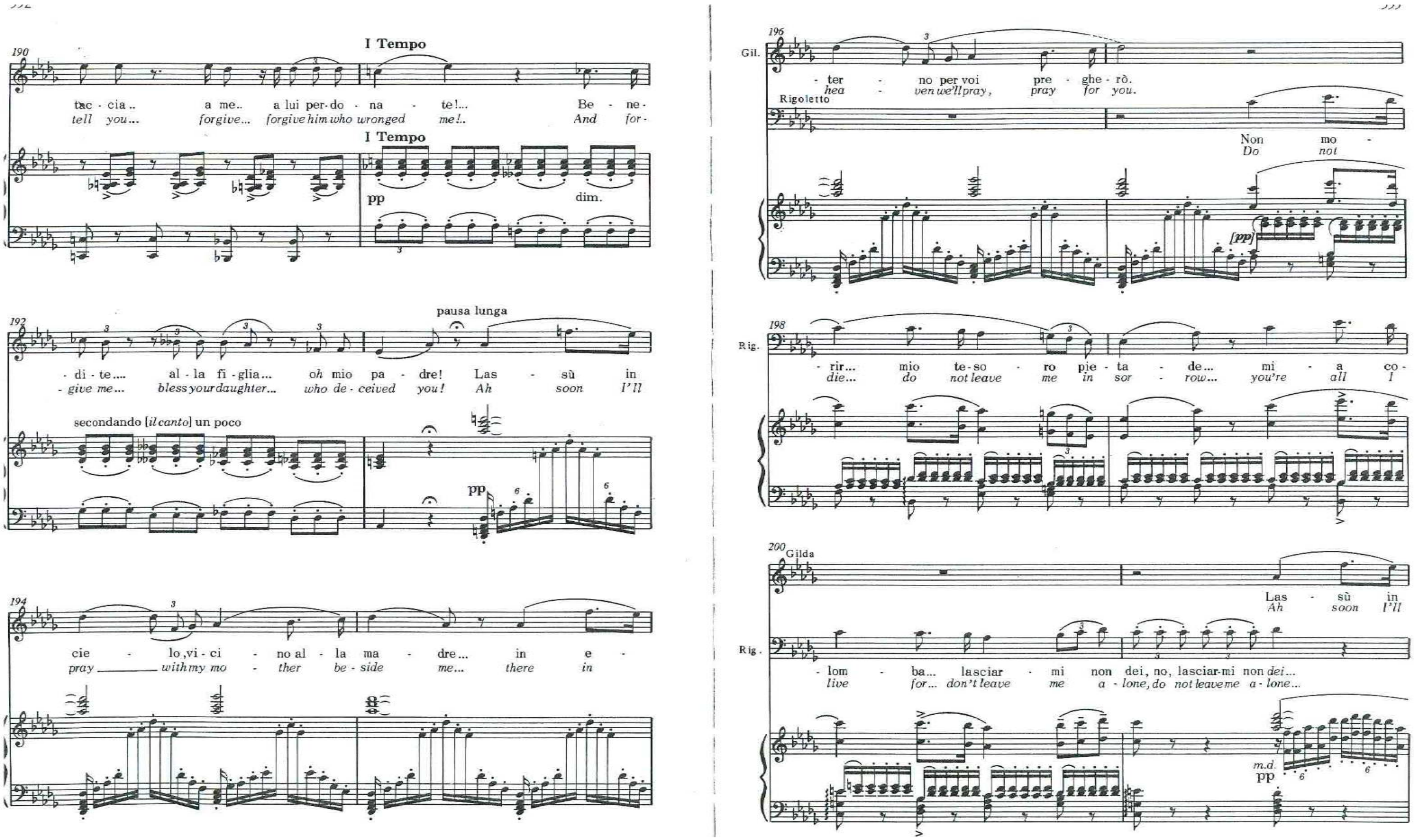
RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION



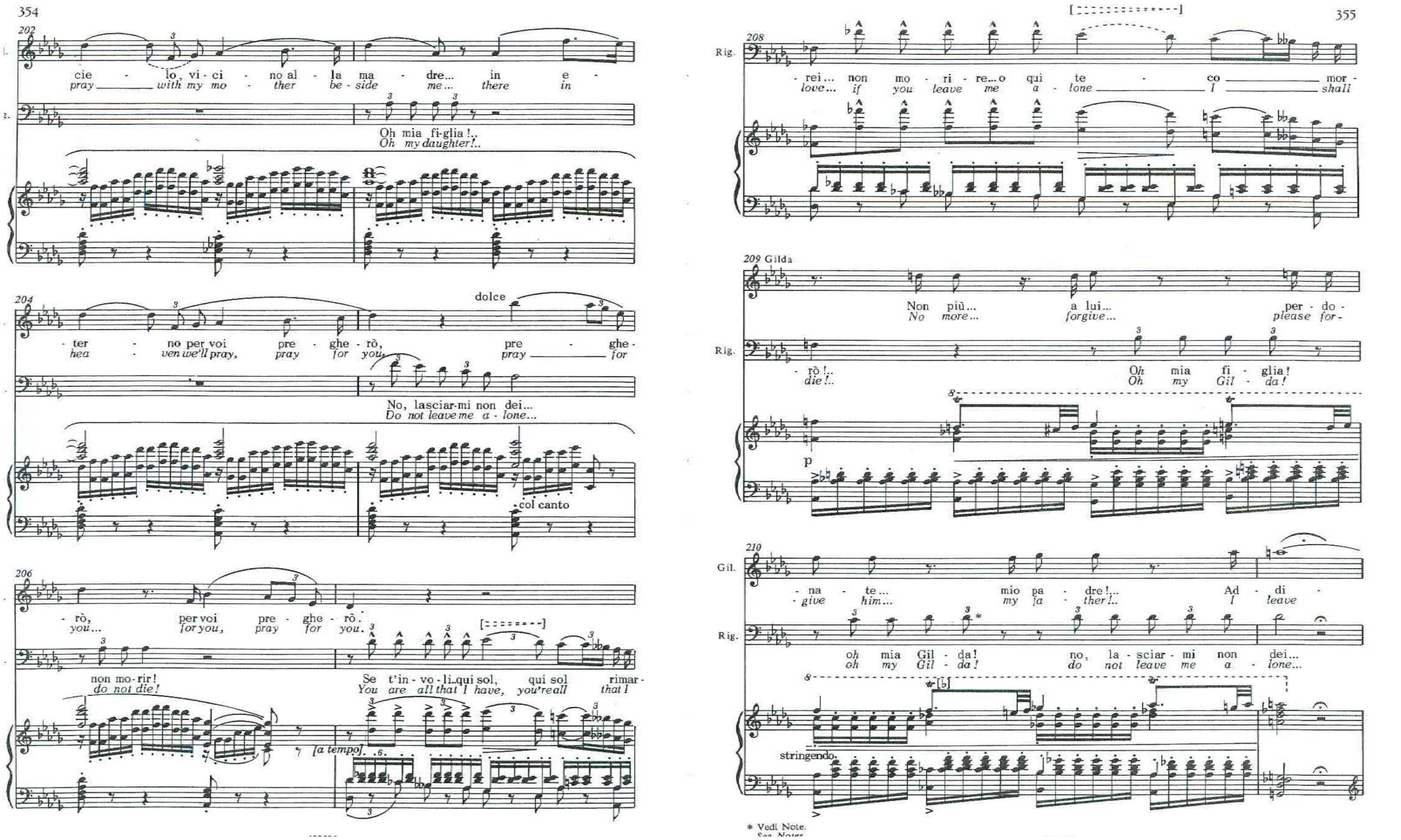
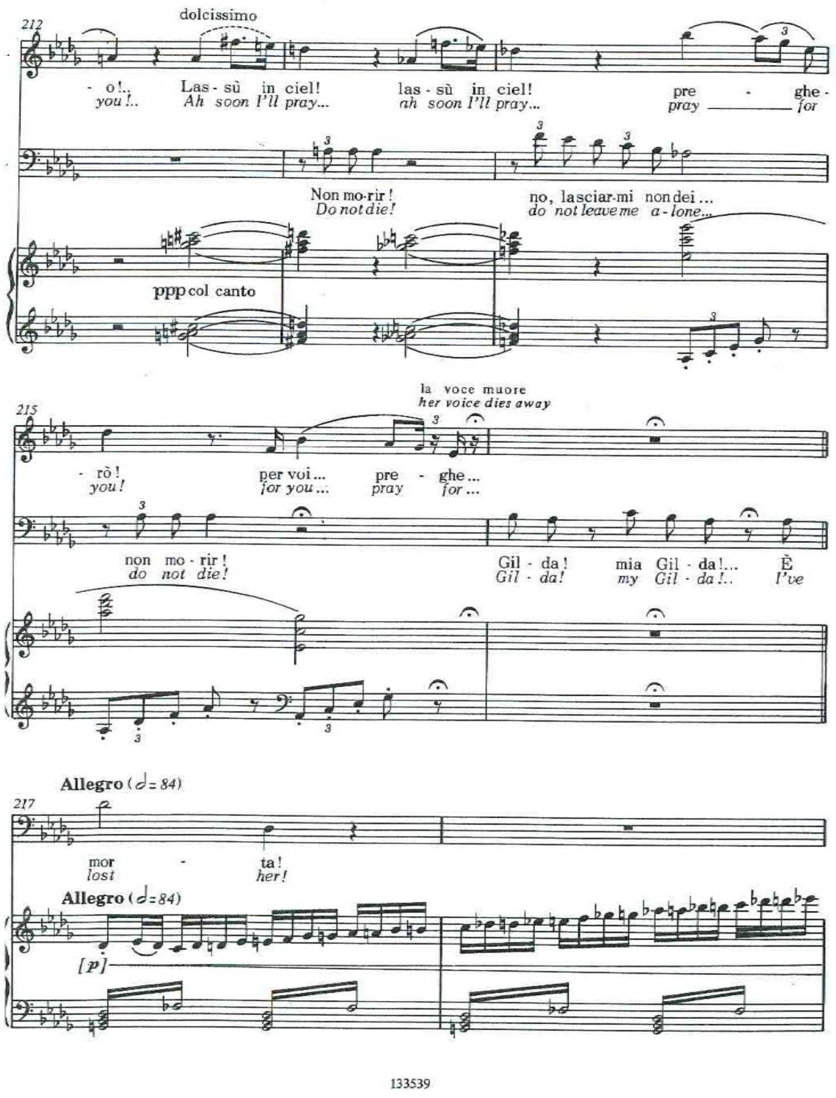
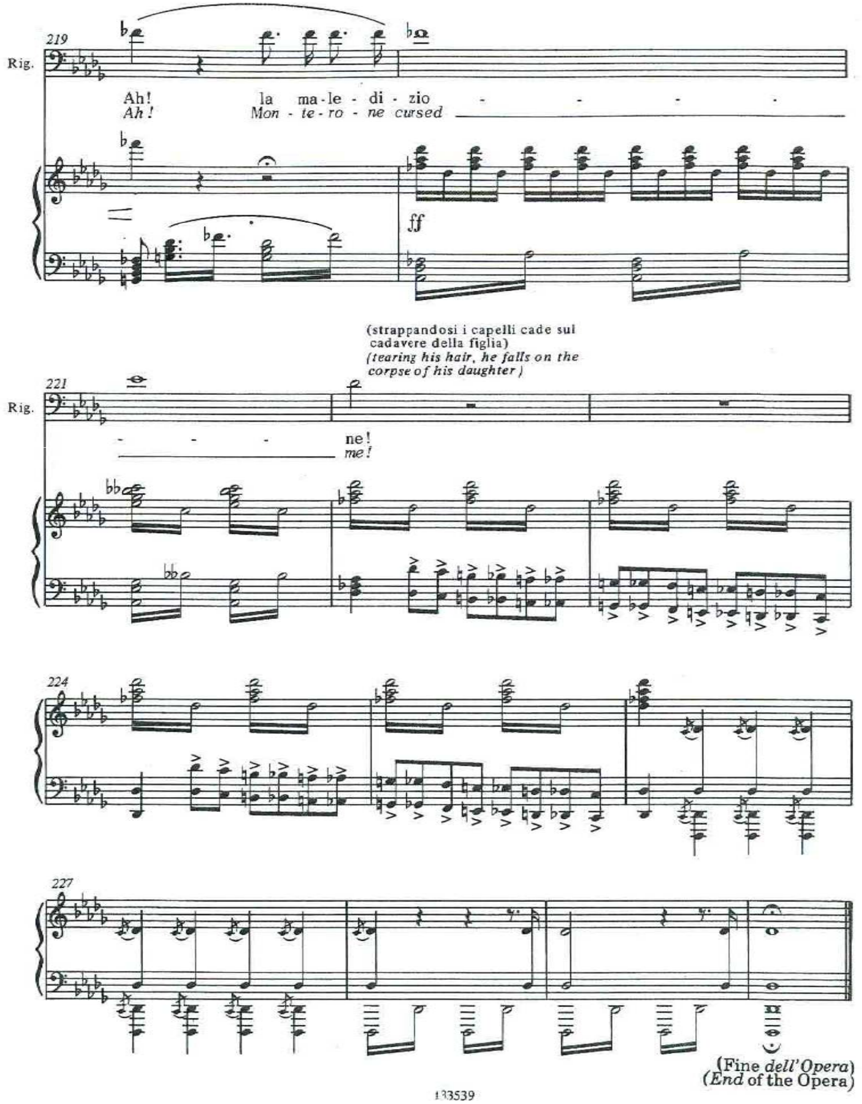
RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION



RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION



RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION



RIGOLETTO, ACT III - CONCLUSION